

# *Robin Kane*

The illustration shows a boy and a girl on a rocky coastline. The boy, on the right, has dark hair and is wearing a yellow and white plaid shirt and red pants. He is holding binoculars to his eyes. The girl, on the left, has long blonde hair and is wearing a pink short-sleeved shirt and a green skirt. She is looking towards the ocean. In the background, there are brown cliffs and a blue-green sea. A small, dark, dinosaur-like creature is visible in the water. The title 'Robin Kane' is written in a large, red, cursive font at the top. Below it, the subtitle 'THE MONSTER OF WOLF POINT' is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom right, the author's name 'by EILEEN HILL' is written in a black, sans-serif font.

## THE MONSTER OF WOLF POINT

by  
EILEEN  
HILL



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- 5 Mystery  
in the Clouds**
- 6 The Monster  
of Wolf Point**

# *Robin Kane*

## THE MONSTER OF WOLF POINT

*by* Eileen Hill

*illustrated by*  
Katherine Sampson

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## *Tremors*

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# *1*

I'M ALWAYS GLAD when it's time for science class," thirteen-year-old Robin Kane said as she took her seat. "Aren't you, too?" she asked her best friend, Mindy Hunter, across the aisle.

"Mm-hmm," Mindy agreed. "When it's over we can go down to the beach and swim or sail."

"Or surf," Robin added, "or go scuba diving or hunt for driftwood."

"And do all the things we like best," Mindy continued. "This is Thursday, but don't forget we get Monday off. Teachers' meeting. We'll have a long weekend, and I'm glad."

Robin nodded her head. "Because I'm glad, though," she added, "it doesn't mean that I don't like science class. Mr. Smith is my very favorite teacher in all of Cypress Junior-Senior High."



"Mine, too!" Mindy said earnestly. "He makes everything so much more interesting and . . . well, even if he is older than my dad, he sounds our age. Do you remember that session on pop music?"

"Do I! Imagine an adult actually knowing that pop music can be scientific. Kevin thought it was groovy. He's sure glad he could work Mr. Smith's class into his schedule this year, after he couldn't take it last year."

Robin's eyes went to the corner of the room where Kevin, fourteen and almost her twin, sat. All the kids liked him. They stopped at his seat, then went on, laughing. Even Mr. Smith paused to say something, took off his glasses, ran his fingers through his graying hair, and smiled.

"What will we do with our extra day, Monday?" Robin said to Mindy as she waited for Mr. Smith to get out his book and call the class to order. "I wish we had an exciting project for the Hunter-Kane Detective Agency, don't you?"

"After that last one, I'm not so sure," Mindy answered. "Way up there in the clouds in that plane and the pilot conked out! I'd just as soon wait awhile and have some fun on the beach."

"Not me!" Robin shook her brown curls. "It's the most fun in the world when we have a case to solve, something moving. . . ."

Moving? Robin paused.

*What makes Mindy's face all quivery? What's happening to her?*

*What's happening to me?*

Robin shook her head and tried to focus her eyes.

Dizzy, feeling queer, feeling shaky, she pitched forward in her seat, trying to steady herself. The floor beneath her shuddered. The walls shook, too, sending window shades banging on their frames.

Mr. Smith's face blurred. The blackboard rolled in sickening waves. The light fixtures in the ceiling swayed. Suddenly the electricity went off, leaving the room in semidarkness. For a moment of frightened stillness, nobody spoke.

Then, "It's an earthquake," Mr. Smith said quietly. "Remain in your seats, please. There may be another tremor."

Fast upon the first eerie upheaval another tremor came, a worse one, that shook the building, knocking books to the floor, shattering instruments in the laboratory. Upstairs some large object, shaken free, crashed.

Along the hall outside, doors slammed. There was a clamor of voices from other classrooms.

"Shouldn't we . . . maybe . . . go . . . outdoors?" Mindy asked, trying to control her trembling.

"I think not," Mr. Smith answered confidently, assuringly. "I don't think this is a severe quake, a really damaging one. I am sure we are in no danger."

Robin reached across for Mindy's hand and squeezed it. Mindy was always terrified by even the smallest quake, and earthquakes occurred frequently in this peninsula south of San Francisco.

Sometimes, just sometimes, even Robin wasn't as brave as she pretended—like now.

The rest of the class was pretending, too. This made it a little easier. Even Kevin pretended. Sure, he was laughing, but Robin could see that white outline around his mouth. It meant he was scared.

If Michael, Mindy's older brother, were here, he would be as calm as Mr. Smith. Michael was a junior. Nothing rattled him. He backed the detective agency in all their projects, and he drove them wherever they wanted to go in his old car. The boys were a part of their every adventure. Michael had as much fun as anyone, too, even if he was a little older.

*I wish I were like him, Robin thought. He wouldn't be acting as though he weren't scared. He just wouldn't be scared. I hate earthquakes. I hate everything that makes me go all trembly inside. Maybe it's just not knowing what may happen. I could face a wildcat easier.*

Robin could. She had. Michael, Mindy, Kevin, and even her ten-year-old sister, Amy, thought she was wholly fearless.

Robin wondered where Amy was now, and Tramp, their dog; Tig, Amy's cat, too. He was prob-

ably up a tree, spitting, in his fright, at anyone who might come near.

The building shuddered again and creaked and groaned. A tiny crack appeared in the classroom wall; it grew and lengthened. Then, suddenly, the quake was over.

"It was a bad one, wasn't it?" Kevin asked Mr. Smith. "I wonder what the seismograph at Berkeley registered."

"We'll know when the *Chronicle* comes out—sooner, maybe, on radio or television. Very strange things happen sometimes after a big convulsion of the ocean bed."

Robin's hand went up.

"Like dead fish?" she asked.

"Sometimes much stranger things than dead fish. Earthquakes often happen way down on the floor of the ocean. There are volcanic eruptions, too, and mountain ranges higher than those on the surface of the earth, with almost bottomless chasms. There are legends about mammoth creatures of the sea living at unplumbed depths. . . . Yes, Kevin?"

"I saw pictures of some pretty wild-looking fish that *have* been discovered. Some had horns; some had stinger spines all over them; some had eyes on the ends of long stalks. There were even some that carried riding lights, just like boats—lights that went on and off. It was neat."

"Those aren't incredible, really, Kevin," Mr. Smith said. "It's the ones nobody has ever seen, but which are thought to be way down in the ocean, that interest me. These are the ones scientists keep hoping they *may* see. Upheavals such as this one today could possibly bring one of them up from the depths."

"Do you actually believe there are such things as sea monsters?" Robin asked, round-eyed.

"I wouldn't go that far, Robin," Mr. Smith said. "Every scientist knows, though, that there is an alien, incredible, maybe terrifying, world beneath the placid surface of the sea as we know it.

"They knew this as far back as the time of Alexander the Great. One legend told of a journey he made to the bottom of the sea. He was enclosed in an airtight box with a little window where he could peep through to see what was outside."

"What did he see?" Robin asked.

"The story said Alexander saw a fish so big it took three days to swim by him, and it was going like a streak of lightning."

"That sure is a wild tale," Kevin broke in. "Did anybody believe he could have held his breath for three days in that airtight box?"

"It's only one of the wild stories you can find in old books. A fish like that would cause quite a sensation along the Pacific coast, wouldn't it?"

"I wish one would show up near here," Robin said,

then paused. "Just listen to the plaster cracking and the funny sounds all over the building, even after the shaking has stopped."

"An earthquake is a bewildering thing," Mr. Smith said. "Its damage is uncertain." He held up his hand for silence. The buzzer on the public address system had sounded. The principal's voice broke in.

"All classes are to be dismissed at once. The school will not be open tomorrow, Friday, so that the extent of possible damage to the buildings may be assessed and repairs made. Since there is a meeting of the teachers on Monday, classes will not resume until Tuesday."

Shouts of joy went up from thirty throats in Mr. Smith's room and resounded from all the rooms in the building. They mingled with the glad whoops of young children from the grade school next door, who ran across the yard swinging lunch pails and trailing sweaters.

An extra day off! Hurrah for earthquakes!

As Robin and her friends went down the street toward home, Michael joined them. There wasn't much damage to be seen. There were a few cracked windows, and, in the plaza at the top of Ocean Avenue, the wooden statue of Father Serra was a little off its base. Michael and Kevin stopped to straighten it.

The group dropped in for a little while at the Cupboard, the gang's meeting place on the corner. Other kids from school were there, all of them talking about the earthquake.

Kevin repeated what Mr. Smith had told the class about the unknown land in the depths. "In this book I'm reading," he went on, "I saw a picture of a sailing vessel. A giant octopus had its long arms wrapped around it. The arms were longer than the ship's masts and were crushing the boat!"

"Goll!" a boy said. "Gruesome! Great!"

"Do you think something like that could appear out there in the Pacific?" Mindy asked as the quartet left the Cupboard and came in sight of the ocean.

"Sure," Kevin said. "Why not?"

Awed, Robin walked along in silence. Nothing like a sea monster could ever happen near the sleepy little village of Pacific Point—maybe way off in Scotland, like the monster in Loch Ness, but never here. *It is pretty wild around Wolf Point, though, she thought, and in the cove below, nobody knows how deep the water is.*

"Look!" Mindy broke in. "There's Amy out in front of your house. What's the matter, Sugar?"

"It's Tig," Amy said, tears streaming down her face. "He's up in the tree. I found him there when I came home from school. He's been up there since the earthquake, Mom said. I can't get him down."

Tramp thinks it's funny and keeps barking. Michael, can you help me?"

"I'll get him," Kevin told her and climbed up the big live oak that shaded the Kane entrance. "Stop spitting, you wildcat! Somebody please muzzle Tramp. Tig won't move as long as that dog keeps barking."

"Here, fella," Michael said and took Tramp up in his arms. "There, now."

He put his hand around Tramp's muzzle, holding it closed, and Tramp wagged his tail. He was enjoying his game with Tig.

"Here, Tig!" Amy called. "Tiglath Pileser, you come right down out of that tree. Let Kevin help you. He never bites, Kevin. Pick him off that branch, please. Tig spits, but he doesn't scratch or bite. You know that."

"How do I know? I've never before been up a tree after a darned cat scared by an earthquake. Hi, Dad!"

Mr. Kane came around the corner of the low, sprawling Kane house. He carried a long pole the boys used for vaulting. "That's good, Dad," Kevin called. "Poke Tig toward me. That does it! See, Tig, it wasn't so bad, was it?"

"It was too. You poked him!" Amy cried. "In another minute he'd have been down without a poke. Daddy, you shouldn't. . . ."



Her father laughed. "Sugar, the cat has been up in that tree for about an hour. Look at him licking his face. He's not hurt. He's glad to have an audience. What a ham he is!"

"I suppose you'll put the whole thing in one of your comic strips, Daddy," Robin said. "It was funny. But for goodness' sake, since everybody thinks you use Kevin and Amy and me for your characters Fatso, Muggins, and Danny, aren't you ever going to let Fatso get any thinner? It's a wonder the kids at school don't call me Fatso."

"Since I started the comic strip before any one of you was born, it couldn't very well be a record of your daily actions, though I must confess I sometimes get inspirations from my family."

"Like now?" Mrs. Kane asked, putting her arm through her husband's. "Look for the next strip, folks—earthquake, Tig up a tree, Amy crying. Well, everybody come and have something to eat. Since you were dismissed early, we'll have a real early picnic supper. That'll give you lots of time at the beach before dark. You'll stay, won't you, Mindy and Michael?"

"Don't we always?" Michael asked, blushing to the roots of his sandy hair. "We spend more time here than we do at home. You'd better telephone Manuela and let her know, Mindy."

Manuela was the housekeeper at the beautiful

Hunter home near Stillwater Cove. It *was* a beautiful home, but motherless, and Mindy and Michael's director-producer father was away much of the time on business.

"I'll call her," Mindy said, "but Manuela says she never starts to get a meal until she knows we're home. May I help, Mrs. Kane?"

"Of course," Robin's mother said. "Everybody helps. I've made the salad. You may set out the paper plates, Mindy, and the napkins. Kevin, you and Michael please go and see if the coals are right for the hamburgers."

"I'll give Tig some milk, Mom," Amy said, "and maybe some hamburger after a while, huh? For being good and coming down out of the tree."

"How do you like that?" Kevin shouted. "'Coming down out of the tree.' I tore my best school pants bringing the beast down. I hope you've got a patch that matches, Mom. Dad, are you cooking, or is Mike?"

"I'll gladly turn it over to Michael," Mr. Kane said. "And hustle and help your mother, Fatso."

"That's the most unfair thing I ever heard!" Robin cried. "You know I'm not fat."

"I know it, honey," her father said. "Don't let yourself be teased so. Let's all have a dip in the pool before we eat."

"Okay," Kevin called as he dashed out of the

house in his blue jean shorts. "Mike, help yourself to swim trunks in my room. Last one in's a Loch Ness monster. Holy Toledo, look who's the first one in! Hey, Tramp!"

After their supper was over, Mrs. Kane said she and her husband would clear up the table and the young people could go down to the beach.

"You can see if the quake brought anything in on the tide," she called. "Don't forget to bring back any pieces of bleached driftwood you find."

Mrs. Kane carved the driftwood into small figures and sold the attractive carvings at good prices to shops in San Francisco.

"Bring your guitar!" Robin called back to Kevin as she and Mindy went ahead along the cutoff that led to the beach. "There'll be bonfires and singing later, after dark. Come along, Amy, you and Tramp."

Pleased, for he liked nothing better than to twang his strings to the sound of Mindy's, Mike's, and Robin's voices, Kevin sprinted back to the house on his long, tanned legs.

Out in the ocean, slender boats ran full-sailed with the gentle wind. Long waves rolled in and curled toward the shore, carrying laughing surfers and tumbling them in the foam that ran up on the sand.

On the wide white beach, Amy left the others to join the younger group building sand castles and conjuring pebble adventures.

Robin, Mindy, Michael, and Kevin climbed the long, cypress-lined path that led to their favorite perch and lookout, the ledge opposite the dark waters of the Wolf Point cove.

From here the whole circle of enchantment spread out beneath them—dark cove, then sunny water and white beach, in the distance, the green golf course, and, farther on, fishing boats bobbing at anchor at the wharf at Monteleone.

It was a scene of serenity soon to be broken by the greatest mystery Pacific Point had ever known.

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## *Mysterious Sighting*

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# 2

KEVIN UNSLUNG his guitar and seated himself on his favorite rock. Michael sprawled comfortably on the grass beside him.

Robin and Mindy sat dangling their feet over the cliff edge, half scared, half thrilled at the great height above the mysterious dark water below.

"Listen!" Robin cried suddenly. "There's somebody scrambling up the side of this cliff. I can hear him. Hey, he must be excited . . . in a hurry to get up here. Can you see him, Michael? Kevin?"

She jumped to her feet, pulling Mindy with her, and watched as the boys flattened themselves and put their heads out over the edge to look down on the steep, brush-studded wall below.

"It's Mr. Smith!" Kevin called out. "He's having a heck of a time holding on to the scrub oak. Jeepers,

is he ever excited about something! Hi!"

"Hi!" Mr. Smith gasped. "It's . . . hard . . . going!"

"We'll climb down and give you a hand," Michael called. "Hold on! Kev, you get behind him. I'll pull and you push. Mr. Smith, you grab the roots. Get a toehold on that jutting rock. Now another. That's right! Here you come, over the edge! Right?"

Kevin scrambled up after his disheveled teacher, breathing hard. "Jeepers, Mr. Smith, I'd say you chose the hard way to get up here."

"I did," the teacher puffed. "There's a reason. There's a . . . very . . . important . . . reason! I wanted to get a better look at that cove. You have binoculars, Robin. Good!"

He took them unceremoniously, and they watched him, astonished and wordless, as he gazed intently over the water—searching, searching, searching.

Finally he gave up and sat hunched and dejected.

"Is there some trouble?" Robin asked. "Something we can do to help?"

"No trouble," Mr. Smith answered. Then his voice grew strong and vibrant. "You'll never believe what I have to tell you! It's incredible! I can't believe it myself, but it's true!"

"Try us!" Robin's voice rang with excitement.

"It's the greatest thing that ever happened to me in my life . . . unbelievable . . . fantastic . . . but I *did* see it. It's out there! And I'll see it again! It

disappeared, so I had to get up here quickly for a better view. I'll see it again!"

"Jeepers!" Robin almost shouted with impatience. "What *are* you talking about? *What did you see?*"

Mr. Smith looked about him at the four young people, his eyes open wide, as though he had just returned from another world, as, indeed, he thought he had.

"Put these glasses to your eyes, Michael," he said very seriously and handed him the binoculars. "As I talk, please keep them turned on the water in the cove below Wolf Point. The rest of you keep looking, too. Now, listen to me.

"This afternoon, after the earthquake, I came down to the shore to see what I could see. Everything seemed much as usual. Some instinct impelled me to get out my catboat and drift along toward Wolf Point. The very quiet of the water all around intrigued me. The quake must have been a severe one, deep down and very, very far away. Surface turbulence will probably appear here later, in a day or two."

"Yes, sir," Robin said, standing on one foot, then the other, her impatient curiosity finding voice. "*What did you see?*"

"That's right. I must get to that. But you won't believe it. *I saw a large, strange creature in the water of the cove!*"

"A sea monster?" Robin gasped.

"I honestly don't know," Mr. Smith answered. "I haven't given it a name. I still can't believe I saw it, but listen!

"A long neck emerged from the water. It was about the size of an elephant's trunk—"

"Right beside your boat?" Robin cried.

"No. Far across the cove.

"At the end of the neck," the teacher continued, "a small head turned warily from side to side."

"Oh, golly!" Kevin said. "Sure thing?"

"Sure thing, Kevin. Michael, don't you see anything over there in the water?"

"Not a ripple. Do go on, Mr. Smith."

"There was a disturbance in the water back of the animal's head, where the neck joined the shadowy body, and back of that, a hump of something that looked like rough brown skin raised itself out of the water and moved what might have been a tail.

"I saw it lift its head and shake it from side to side. For a few moments I sat stupefied. Then, so I might get closer, I put up my sail. Luckily, a light breeze filled it, and my boat glided closer.

"The moment the boat moved, however, the creature seemed disturbed. It moved toward the deep water, then sank, almost vertically. It did not dive. Though I kept my eyes fixed on the place where it disappeared, I didn't see it again.



"Then it occurred to me that I'd have a wider view of the cove if I could get up to this high place. My eagerness must have carried me up a pretty steep incline."

Kevin whistled. "I'll say it did!"

"Unfortunately, to no avail," Mr. Smith said sadly.

So engrossed had the young people and the teacher been that they had not been aware of listeners. They were abruptly startled, then, when they heard two boys who stood on the trail, laughing boisterously.

"Man, what a yarn! Hear what the teacher said, Art? A hunk of seaweed we see every day, and he calls it a sea monster!"

"I haven't given any name to what I saw today," Mr. Smith said quickly. "I do not intend to give it a name. I shall leave this to men of greater knowledge than mine. Now, if you will excuse me. . . ." He waited with great dignity while the two boys, still laughing derisively, moved out of sight.

"They're the worst characters we've ever had at school," Robin said.

"Yeah, Mike, why didn't you tell 'em off?" Kevin asked.

"Not on your life," Michael answered. "Those soreheads just have it in for Mr. Smith because he flunked them when they cheated. They boasted about it themselves. Consider the source, I say."



"Something like that," Mr. Smith said. "Think no more about them. Well, I did hope for another glimpse of that animal from up here. Thank you for the binoculars, Robin. I'll go down and collect my catboat and report my experience to the men at the Marine Laboratory at Monteleone."

"Mike and I will take your catboat in for you, Mr. Smith, if you want to get over there before the laboratory closes. Do you have your car?"

"At the foot of Ocean Avenue, Kevin. I'll appreciate it very much if you'll leave my boat in its slot at Clearwater Cove. Then I'll have time to see my friend Professor Edwards, who teaches science at Monteleone Junior College."

"I think he's right down on the beach now, picnicking with his family," Robin said. "At least, his kids were on the sand where we left Amy building castles."

"That's good. I'll see him there. I'm grateful to all four of you for your help. Keep watching, please. If you see the thing I saw today—and somebody will—try to photograph it. Then seal your camera before witnesses."

"We'll do that!" Robin answered quickly. "We'll have a camera with us all the time, and we'll never stop watching. Just imagine!

"Just imagine!" she repeated, when their teacher had gone. "A sea monster right here in Pacific Point!

We'll be as famous as that Loch Ness place in Scotland!"

"I'm not too sure," Kevin said, puzzled. "It *could* have been seaweed he saw. Those big, round, rubbery tubes of seaweed from deep water are thrown up on the shore every day. They're dark brown, too, with big knobs at the end that could look like heads."

"Mr. Smith knows what seaweed looks like," Robin said. "He was born and raised right in this county. He'd never mistake seaweed for a living animal."

"He didn't say it was living, and he didn't say it wasn't seaweed," Kevin said, shrugging his shoulders. "Maybe it was. Maybe it wasn't. What do you think, Mike?"

"I agree with Robin. More than that, I believe Mr. Smith saw something no one has ever seen before in the Wolf Point cove—perhaps nowhere else in the Pacific Ocean. We don't have school tomorrow. This will give us a chance to do some serious looking."

"See, Kevin? Michael is as sure as I am!"

"I never said I didn't think Mr. Smith saw a sea monster," Kevin said, laughing.

"Don't call it that till Mr. Smith himself does," Robin said quickly.

"'Sea monster' can mean lots of things," Michael said. "It can cover octopuses, squids, killer whales, manta rays, sharks— Let's go to the library and do

some research after we take the catboat in."

"Later," Robin said. "Not one of those things you mentioned has a long neck sticking out of the water. Let's go down to the beach at the foot of Ocean Avenue. Maybe people in the village have already heard about it. You can be sure they won't ridicule Mr. Smith the way Frank and Art did. The people of Pacific Point have great respect for our science teacher. Let's go! I can hear a lot of voices!"

Robin started to run, with Mindy close behind her and Kevin and Michael following.

"How do you suppose a crowd gathered so soon?" Kevin called out. "How would they know about it?"

"The same way we heard about it," Robin called back. "Mr. Smith didn't single us out to tell his story to. We just happened to be up there on the cliff. He was so excited he had to tell someone. Those people down there seem to be excited, too. There're Frank and Art. They may have spread the story, even if they didn't seem to believe it. Gosh! There's a man with a camera."

"It's some guy taking pictures of the sand castles the kids have built. Slow down, Robin," Kevin called.

"No, he isn't, Kevin. He may have come here for that, but he has his camera pointed out to sea. Who is he? That man near him, Mindy, is from MJTV. He's the reporter who talked to us after we found the cattle thieves out at Rancho Lucia. Let's go over

to where he is. Hi!" she called.

"Hi, Robin! Hi, Mindy!" the man answered. "Sleuthing again? What do you know about the thing Mr. Smith saw?"

"We just know that he saw a strange animal over near Wolf Point. How did the news get around so quickly?"

"Pacific Point *is* a small village, Robin, remember? News travels fast. I was here getting some firsthand accounts of the earthquake, but this is much more interesting."

"Where did the man with the camera come from? Is he a tourist?"

"No, he's a writer. He was taking pictures of the town for an article he's doing on California earthquakes. Would you like to meet him?"

"Oh, yes, I would," Robin answered quickly.

The man from MJTV touched the author's arm. "Mr. Logan Denny, this is Robin Kane, her brother Kevin, Mindy Hunter, and her brother Michael. They are students at Cypress Junior-Senior High School. Mr. Smith is their science teacher. Robin and Mindy are amateur detectives—darned good ones, too."

"Indeed?" Mr. Denny said as he acknowledged the introduction. "What do you know about the sea monster?"

"Not very much—" Mindy began.

Robin broke in. "We know that Mr. Smith saw a strange animal out in the cove this afternoon, over there below Wolf Point. Only *he* didn't call it a sea monster. He said it had a long neck and a head. . . . But then, you've already talked to him, haven't you?"

"I haven't had that honor yet," the writer said. "He seems to have left the beach."

"To go over to the Marine Laboratory," Robin said, "to report his sighting. You will probably have a chance to talk with him when he comes back. Was it Professor Edwards from Junior College who told you about Mr. Smith?"

"I told him," the man from MJTV answered. "I was here when Mr. Smith talked to Professor Edwards. We hope to talk to him when he comes back. Mr. Denny would like a story from him. By a strange coincidence, he's doing a book about sea monsters. He's been to Scotland—to Loch Ness."

"Oh!" Robin cried, awed. "Do you think Mr. Smith saw anything like the Loch Ness monster?"

"It could be," Mr. Denny answered solemnly. "Most anything can happen. From the description I've heard, it sounds very much like the animal people have been hoping to find at Loch Ness—a plesiosaurus. This animal supposedly has been extinct for millions of years."

Robin's round blue eyes fairly popped. "Right here in Pacific Point?" she asked, unbelieving. "Do

you mean you may get a picture of it right here in Pacific Point?"

"If I'm lucky enough to be the first one to see it again," Mr. Denny said. "I've been taking pictures of the crowd. I just caught one of you."

"Did anybody ever get a picture of the Loch Ness monster?" Kevin asked.

"Not too good a one," Mr. Denny said. "I hope I'll have better luck. My book is almost ready to go to the publisher. I hope I'll be able to add a chapter about a Pacific Point monster—just possibly a plesiosaurus. I'll have to work fast if I do."

"How long has it been since the first person saw that thing at Loch Ness?" Kevin asked.

"April fourteenth, 1933," Mr. Denny answered.

"Holy cow!" Kevin shouted. "If we have to wait that long for the Pacific Point monster, we'll have beards down to here!" He measured the distance to his waistline.

"It's been seen many times, hundreds of times, since then," Mr. Denny said. "Why don't you look it up in the library? A couple of young sleuths could soon have the answer." He turned away to take more pictures.

"If he only knew some of the things you have turned up!" Kevin said proudly.

"Yeah," Michael agreed. "He'd get his eyes opened."



“That doesn’t matter,” Robin said confidently. “I don’t think what happened in Scotland has anything to do with what may happen right here in Pacific Point. Mr. Denny said it can be seen again. You can be pretty sure he wouldn’t stay around if he didn’t think so. A lot of other people seem to think so, too. Just look at the crowd! There are Mom and Dad, Kevin. Amy’s with them, and Tramp, of course. Let’s say hi to them and ask them to take your guitar. Then we’ll go to the library, shall we?”

“We’ll meet you there when we come back from taking Mr. Smith’s boat in, okay?”

“Okay,” Robin said. “Then maybe we can come back down here this evening. Maybe Mr. Smith will be back here by then. Golly, who’d have thought that earthquake would be the start of so much fun?”

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## *“Some Kind of ‘Saurus’?”*

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### 3

IF YOU CAN dry this newspaper out, you can have it,” Kevin told Robin the next morning as she slipped into her place at the table in the kitchen. “Don’t blame Tramp, either, for letting it get wet. He got it out of a puddle and brought it to the door. Good old Tramp!”

“You’d think the delivery boy could hit the porch one time out of ten, wouldn’t you?” Robin asked as she tried to open the soggy paper.

“Especially when the paper may have Mr. Denny’s picture of Robin Kane, monster-watcher, in it,” Kevin said. “Leave it in the oven where Mom put it, Robin. The heat’s on low, and if you leave the oven door open, it’ll dry enough so we can read it. Boy, is this ever a gully washer! Listen to it pour!”

“There’s fog, too,” Robin said gloomily. “You

can't even see through the window. Even if we *could* go down to the beach—and I can just hear Mom letting us go in such a cloudburst—we couldn't see Wolf Point, let alone anything in the water near it. Darn it! With all the sunshiny days we have all the time, today had to be like this!"

"There's one good thing about this kind of a rain," Mrs. Kane said, setting the refilled milk pitcher near Robin. "It's not likely to last long."

"Daddy said he thought we were in for an all-day pour-down," Amy said. "Mom, may I have another doughnut?"

"That will be your fourth, but go ahead," her mother said. "If you're to have a stomachache, I'd rather it was on a day like this. Kevin, your father made a fire in the family room before he went out to his studio. Take the paper in there and spread it on the hearth. All it's doing now is steaming. Eat everything I gave you, Amy!"

"Even oatmeal?"

"Especially oatmeal."

"Oh, Mom, oatmeal's the boringest thing in the whole world. I *hate* oatmeal. I hate all cereal and all gelatin and all puddings and all—"

"Even tap-eye-o-ca?" Kevin teased.

Amy hung her head. "I only called it that *once*, Kevin, and you know it, and you're going to keep it up forever."

"I'm sorry, Sugar. I was only fooling. But it *was* a funny way to say it. And, if I know Mom, you'd better eat up your oatmeal. Come on, Robin, let's go in and see what's in the paper about Mr. Smith's strange animal."

The family room was a comfortable hodgepodge. The whole family loved it. There were shelves bursting with books, from old, cloth picture books to well-thumbed favorites for all ages. There were school-books, passed on from one child to another, dictionaries, and encyclopedias.

A pegboard on the wall held messages, some of them weeks old, Amy's drawings, Robin's and Kevin's **SAVE THIS** warnings, their parents' reminders of tasks to be done, and notes about lessons to be studied.

There were lumpy, cozy chairs, castoffs from the living room, and a shabby sofa with a colorful chintz slipcover. There were cushions on the floor, records spilling from the cabinet, a tape recorder, and a broken record player Kevin was always going to fix. Against the wall stood a sturdy upright piano.

The bathroom off the family room had once been a storage room for skates, scuba gear, sail bags, and even surfboards, until Mr. Kane had cleaned up the two old guesthouses in back of their home. He had taken one to use as a studio and turned the other into a place for his children's sports gear. Robin and

Kevin called it "The Huddle" because they huddled there with Mindy and Michael to discuss important things. It wasn't exactly a clubhouse or a club, but the four of them were the only ones allowed in The Huddle, except Amy and Tramp and Tig.

"Here it is!" Kevin shouted as he opened the half-dry newspaper. "And here's Princess Pain-in-the-Neck, right on the front page."

"Let me see," Robin demanded and lay flat on her stomach with the paper spread in front of her. "Golly! It's a good picture. It says under it, 'Robin Kane, one of Mr. Smith's pupils, gave a dramatic description of. . . .' What's so 'dramatic' about what I told him? I only repeated what Mr. Smith said."

"You're always dramatic about everything," Kevin said. "Remember, Mom, when Moira Rafferty, that Irish actress, was visiting Mindy? For a while, Robin acted out everything she did. Boy, I remember it, even if she doesn't!"

Kevin looked toward heaven, opened his arms wide, and quoted:

" 'O! swear not by the moon,  
the inconstant moon,  
That monthly changes in her  
circled orb. . . . ' "

"Mom, make him stop it," Robin pleaded. "Anyway, Kevin, you act like you know everything



about everything. Mom, you should have heard him the other day when we were discussing space."

"All I said was space must have some end. Heck, you can look at the horizon and see the sky end."

"If you'd ever paid any attention to Mr. Smith in class, you'd know that the horizon is an optical illusion."

"Look who's talking!"

"All right! When the astronauts were on the moon, they could look way beyond and still see space."

"I think it ends someplace."

"See, Mom? Even Einstein couldn't convince him."

"Einstein talked about relativity. I'm talking about an end to space. Someday I'm going to know the answer to it. Someday I'm going to know *all* of the answers about space!"

"That's enough bickering from both of you. Tell us what the newspaper has to say about the sea monster."

"Mr. Smith doesn't want people to call it that," Kevin said.

"Mr. Logan Denny calls it that right here in this paper," Robin said. "He has his name signed to the article, too. I'm not going to call it that, though, until I hear Mr. Smith do it. Mom, may we possibly go down to the beach?"

"Not in this rain. There wouldn't be a soul there

now. Other people are sensible enough to stay in when the streets are flooding. You'd have to wear hip boots."

"We can go barefoot."

"You may go when the rain lets up a little. Mr. Denny didn't have much to say in that article, did he? I mean, very little that we didn't know when our family left the beach last night."

"How could he?" Robin asked. "That paper was already being made up a hundred miles away, in San Francisco, before we ever left the beach. Mom, can't we go and see what's happened by now?"

"I just said no, Robin, not while the rain is coming down in buckets. You know what happens to those big pine trees on Scenic Drive. With their shallow roots in this soggy, sandy ground, they can topple over on people and houses. That's what happens."

"Oh, Mom, you *are* a worrywart. What on earth can we do instead—sit here and twiddle our thumbs?"

"Robin!"

"I'm sorry, Mom, but we can't just play Scrabble or something, with such important stuff about to happen."

"You can listen to a song I made up," Amy said, twirling the piano stool.

"No, thanks!" Kevin said and held his ears.



"Another time," Robin said.

"Allll . . . right! I'll play it for you."

Amy drummed out a discordant bass and treble and sang:

"It's the chocolate in the middle of the cookie,  
And the meat in the hamburger bun,  
It's the middle of the night when things  
go 'bool'  
And the middle of the rain for fun!

"I made it up myself," she said and ran a glissando down the keys with thumb and forefinger.

"I believe it," Kevin said.

"You didn't, Sugar!" Robin said. "It's pretty good."

"Well . . . I almost did."

"Who wrote the words?"

"Tramp!" Amy shouted. "I gave him part of my cookie. Say, Robin, do you know what?"

"What?"

"It's stopped raining."

Robin made one jump for her camera and the binoculars.

"May we go now, Mom?"

Mrs. Kane nodded her head.

"May I go, too?" Amy asked. "Please, Robin?"

"Of course, Sugar, if Mom says so. And Tramp and Tig, too."

Amy laughed. "Not Tig. He hates water. Robin, aren't we going to wait for Michael and Mindy?"

"They just honked out in front; didn't you hear them? 'Bye, Mom. Come on, Kev and Amy!"

The first person Robin saw on the beach was Logan Denny. She felt important when he called to her and motioned for Mindy and the boys to stop with her.

"Please tell me exactly what your science teacher called the strange thing he saw near Wolf Point," he asked.

"I don't remember that he called it anything," Robin said, frowning.

"Oh, come now, didn't he call it some kind of '*saurus*'?"

"No, sir, he didn't."

"Yesterday, I thought you mentioned some kind of prehistoric animal," Mr. Denny persisted.

Robin wrinkled her forehead. "It was you who said plesiosaurus, Mr. Denny. You said from the description it just had to be a plesiosaurus. Mr. Smith didn't say that was what he saw. Why, that thing would be ten million years old if anyone saw it now, and that's impossible."

"Oh, no, it isn't impossible. It's what my book is all about, Robin. I have records of any number of incidents in which people have reported seeing an

animal, or the shadow of an animal, looking exactly like a plesiosaurus. Did you ever hear of a fish called coelacanth?"

Robin shook her head no.

"Well, the coelacanth used to be known only to students of fossils, since it flourished forty million years ago, but—and listen to this—in 1939, off South Africa, a coelacanth was caught, very much alive, in a net. That isn't all. Since that time, more of them have been caught. So, you see, it is not at all impossible that a plesiosaurus, a live one, may be found. Did you see the drawing of it in the newspaper?"

"Yes, but Mr. Smith didn't make that drawing."

"No, I did. The paper asked me to do it. It was a composite of all the strange animals people have told me they have seen. Would you say it looked like the animal Mr. Smith described?"

Pinned down, Robin didn't want to make any statement Mr. Smith might not like, but, heavens, if a fish forty million years old had been found. . . .

"It *is* the way I imagined it might look," she admitted. "Say, maybe it could have been a plesiosaurus Mr. Smith saw. What do you know?"

Mr. Denny made some hastily penciled notes, then turned to talk with reporters.

"Oh, Robin," Kevin said, "Mr. Smith should be the judge of what goes into Mr. Denny's articles—not you."

"Didn't you hear what he said about that forty-million-year-old fish?" Robin asked. "I *know* Mr. Smith is far too modest. I *know* the thing he saw was rare and important. Anyway, all I said was that it *could* be a plesiosaurus, and it could."

"Okay," Kevin said. "Have it your way. You could be right."

As the day wore on, the excitement grew.

"They've closed most of the stores in the village," Mrs. Kane reported when she and Mr. Kane arrived at the beach. "They might as well. The whole village is down here watching. We watched television for a while after you left to come down here. There were pictures of the crowd on a news program. The commentator seemed quite excited."

"Gosh!" Kevin said. "It's almost like it was when the astronauts were on their way to the moon!"

"Not quite," Mr. Kane said, laughing. "I doubt that half a billion people are curious about what is going on at Pacific Point, California. It's great publicity for our village, though—for the whole peninsula. I never saw so many cameras in action."

"Or so little to point them at!" Kevin said woe-fully.

"Hasn't anyone seen anything at all?" his mother asked.

"There have been some false alarms," Robin said,

shaking her head. "What are you laughing at, Michael?"

"At Tramp. He's having more fun out of this whole thing than anyone else. He runs after the waves, barking as they recede. When they come in again, he acts as though it's a personal insult, after he'd chased them away. Watch! You'd think he'd get tired sometime."

"I'd think Robin would get tired sometime," Mrs. Kane said. "She's kept hopping all day long."

"And we all hop right along with her," Mindy sighed.

Mrs. Kane looked around her. "Has anyone seen Mr. Smith?"

"No," Robin said. "You'd think, wouldn't you, that he'd stay right here where we've been all day long—just opposite Wolf Point—watching. It's where he first saw that thing."

"He's not a limelight hugger," Kevin began.

Robin bristled. "I suppose I am."

"Oh, Kevin, knock it off," Michael said good-naturedly. "We're all as excited and interested as Robin is. We're just afraid to act like it. She isn't."

"I guess you're right," Kevin acknowledged. "Mom, do you suppose you could take Tramp with you for a while? He keeps me busy trying to watch him. He's too . . . too—"

"Exuberant?" Mr. Kane supplied, laughing. "We'll

take him, Kevin. Your mother brought his leash. That'll slow him down a little."

"Don't keep him on the leash all the time, please," Robin begged. "It's his big day, the same as it is for anybody else."

"Then I'll put Amy on a leash for a while," her mother said. "I used to, when she was three. The rest of you are too single-minded right now to watch what she's doing. Come on, Sugar."

"I was getting tired trying to keep up with them, anyhow," Amy said. "Mom, did you bring anything to eat, maybe?"

"Cookies for everybody," Mrs. Kane answered. "Your dad has Cokes in that basket. I don't think anybody in the village will have a decent meal tonight."

"Who wants food?" Kevin asked, stuffing his mouth with chocolate cookies.

Toward evening the crowd thinned. Parents with tired children grumbled about a whole day lost. Some of the reporters headed for the airport at Monteleone.

Robin and Michael and Kevin and Mindy settled down for a long watch atop the cliff opposite Wolf Point.

They hadn't been there long when Robin spotted Frank and Art not far away. She had been wondering

why they hadn't appeared before in the crowd.

"Where's Professor Smith?" Frank called. "Ain't seen His Highness all day. Do you suppose the monster ate him, Robin?"

Robin didn't answer.

"Did he stake you out up here to keep watch?" Frank persisted. "You and your boy friends?"

"My 'boy friend' is my brother Kevin, as you well know," Robin replied with spirit. "And Mindy's 'boy friend' is her brother Michael. You'd better know that, too."

"I meant the other way around." Frank smirked.

Then Michael stood up—star tackle on the Cypress High team.

Frank took one look at Michael's face, picked up some stones, aimed, and threw them over the cliff into the ocean. "Cool it!" he told Michael. "Ready to leave, Art?"

They started down the hill.

"They don't lose any opportunity to belittle Mr. Smith, do they?" Mindy asked. "It wasn't *his* fault they cheated and flunked. He gave them every chance to make it up. They may try to get even, though."

"Not them. They're cowards," Robin said. "All Michael had to do was look at them, and they ran. I'm not scared for Mr. Smith. He's so far above them, they can't even touch him . . . ever."

"I'm not so sure of that," Michael said, his eyes

turned toward the place the two bullies had disappeared.

"Mr. Smith doesn't even know they exist," Robin went on. "He's so calm—like all great discoverers. All great men are like that."

"You know 'em all, don't you, Robin?" Kevin teased.

"No, I don't. I don't know any but Mr. Smith. I do know that what he saw was something terrific, and don't you forget it, Kevin Kane."

"I'm not likely to, stringing along with you. Say, did Mom bring anything in that bag except cookies?"

"Sandwiches," Robin said and handed him the bag. "Honest, Kevin . . . your stomach . . . you're always hungry. Say, what do you suppose that bunch of boats are doing? They're all huddling around that place over there. Do you think they've found something?"

"I'll take the binoculars, Kev," Michael said and held out his hand. "Say—Mr. Smith is there. He's in that green powerboat. It's a boat from the Marine Laboratory at Monteleone, isn't it?"

"Right!" Kevin said. "What are they doing?"

"It looks as though they're taking soundings," Michael reported.

"What are they finding?" Robin asked.

"Who knows?" Kevin answered. "It's too far to see, and they aren't sending up any smoke signals."



We may as well gather our things and go.”

“Oh, dear,” Robin said. “Just when *something* is starting to happen, it has to go and turn dark. I suppose we’ll have to listen to the news and see if there’s any report from the laboratory. I *hate* waiting and waiting and waiting.”

“Let’s go to the library again,” Michael suggested. “We can hunt for some more about that coelacanth Mr. Denny told you about, Robin—that is, if the library hasn’t closed for the day, too.”

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## *Monster Stories*

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### 4

THE NEXT MORNING Robin took her Candy Striper uniform out of the closet, hesitated, hung it back up, and called downstairs to her mother.

“Mom, do I *have* to go to the hospital today? It’s liable to be the most important day in the whole world to me.”

“I can’t hear you, Robin,” her mother answered. “Come downstairs if you have something to say. Heavens! I didn’t mean *jump* all the way down! Michael picked up Kevin when he dropped Mindy off here. She hasn’t had breakfast, so she’ll have it with you. Now, what was it you said?”

Robin said hi to Mindy, then repeated to her mother what she had asked, adding, “Do we, Mom? Do we have to go to the hospital?”

“I can’t answer for Mindy, as you know, Robin.

However, there are sick people who must have care, no matter what else is happening. You agreed to do volunteer work in the hospital, and this is your day to do it. It's Kevin's day, and Michael's, too, to do work they volunteered to do."

"Yes, and what did they volunteer to do? Lucky them! To rake the beach with a lot of other kids and keep it clear of debris. While they're right down where everything is happening, Mindy and I will be stuck at the hospital, where nothing is happening."

Mrs. Kane turned from the stove, where she was frying bacon. "Nothing, Robin, but nurses and doctors helping sick people to get well; probably saving people's lives. What has happened to your sense of values?"

"Oh, nothing, Mom. It's just that *nobody* can be so perfect as to want to go to that hospital, so far away from the beach where history is being made."

"Is it? The morning paper is beginning to doubt it. There's a cartoon making fun of the 'Pacific Point Monster,' as they call it. Then, in 'Letters From the People' there is one from a member of our own village council."

Robin poured milk and put the glasses at her place and Mindy's.

"I didn't see it. What did it say?"

"That it's time for Pacific Point to return to sanity. There's a picture, too, of some men from the Marine

Laboratory making soundings over near Wolf Point."

"We saw them doing it last evening before dark. What did they find?"

"What did they expect to find?"

"Michael told Mindy and Kevin and me that scientists have an echo sounder now—sort of a loud-speaker, attached to the hull of the boat, down below the waterline. Every few seconds it shoots high-pitched notes down into the deep water. The sound waves hit the ocean bed and bounce back. The echo is picked up on microphones and recorded on a screen with dots as the boat moves along. It could record the outline of a wreck, a school of fish, or any large body, like, maybe, the thing Mr. Smith saw."

"Hmmm, they must not have found anything solid last evening, because the legend under the picture says, 'What did they find? Nothing.'"

Robin's face reddened. "I think that's mean. That old San Francisco newspaper is just jealous. They want everything interesting that ever happens to take place right in their own bay."

"Yes," Mindy agreed. "Our little village newspaper says it's sorry when somebody jumps off a San Francisco bridge. No matter what queer things happen in that city, we don't make fun of them. You're right, Robin. They're jealous."

Robin nodded her head emphatically. "Who cares

what an old letter to the paper says, anyway? Look at this double page, Mindy. It's Mr. Logan Denny's story. He's had simply marvelous stories in the paper every day. *He* doesn't make fun of Pacific Point. He believes Mr. Smith saw a plesiosaurus."

"Golly, Robin," Mindy said excitedly, "some of the things he tells about in this paper are the same things we found in the library. Michael and Kevin are going to want to see this. It was fun, wasn't it, doing all that work evenings?"

"Read it out loud, Mindy, please. You want to hear it, don't you, Mom?"

"Of course I do, if there's time before you have to go to the hospital."

"There is, I'm sure. Go ahead, Mindy."

"This part of the story is from *Time* magazine. It's dated December twenty-seventh, 1968, and it's from the 'Science' section of *Time*:

"December weather is cold and blustery around Scotland's Loch Ness, so the story could hardly have been concocted to draw tourists. Even more remarkable, it was written by capable scientists and published in the respectable British journal *New Scientist*. Thus it was hard to scoff last week at the latest monster tale. This time, after centuries of myth, speculation, and hoax, there was apparently scientific evidence that some kind of a large creature . . . or creatures . . . may indeed roam the depths of Loch Ness.

"The startling observation was made by a University of Birmingham team armed with a modern monster detector: sophisticated sonar equipment."

"What do you think of that, Mom?" Robin said gleefully. "It goes on to describe the sonar soundings, just as Michael described what those men were doing last evening."

"There's a picture with the article in *Time*, isn't there?" Robin's mother asked.

"Yes . . . just look at it! It looks just the same as Mr. Smith described the thing he saw!"

"This is what the article says about the picture," Mindy continued. "I'm still quoting from *Time*:

"Since 1962, an organization named the Loch Ness Phenomena Investigations Bureau, Ltd., has been analyzing all monster sightings. Its volunteer members have shot pictures of monsterlike objects from seven lakeside camera stations. The most famous Loch Ness photograph, taken by a touring surgeon in 1934, shows a long-necked creature making waves in the lake."

"Just look at this picture, Mom!" Robin exclaimed. "Could anything be plainer? I'll never rest till we have a picture of the thing Mr. Smith saw right over there in the water off Wolf Point! I'll never rest!"

"I doubt if you will," her mother said. "You never rest, anyway, when you have a project under way."

That picture is pretty convincing, isn't it?"

"Yes, and that's not all," Robin went on. "We found an Associated Press news story, dated September seventeenth, 1969, from Inverness, Scotland, and this is what *it* said:

"So many British gamblers placed bets that the Loch Ness monster really exists that Ladbrokes, one of Britain's top bookmaking firms, shortened the odds on its being found from 10-1 to 6-1.

"Two teams of British scientists tested sonar equipment they will use to track down the monster in the 20-mile-long loch. They are bombarding the murky depths of the loch with electronic noises which they hope will drive the monster into an area where they can pick it up on sonar or radar equipment. . . . The scientists are headed by technicians from Britain's Plesey Electronics Company, and experts from Birmingham University.

"See, Mom? What those British scientists are trying to do to flush out the Loch Ness monster is something like what Mr. Smith believes the earthquake did. It makes sense, doesn't it? Do you wonder that I'm certain Mr. Smith really saw something like the picture?"

"No, Robin."

"Jeepers, even that isn't all we found in the library. This one is from the *New York Times* News Service, under a Miami, Florida, dateline of November twenty-sixth, 1965:

"A marine biologist here said recently that he did not doubt the accuracy of old woodcuts depicting whaling boats encircled in the tentacles of a sea monster.

"Gilbert Voss of the University of Miami's institute of marine science made his remark after delivering a report to an international conference on tropical oceanography."

"What do you think of that, Mrs. Kane?" Mindy asked, thrilled.

"Not as much as I think of the story in *Time* magazine, with that picture. The one you just read referred to giant squids or octopuses. Almost everyone knows there may be great octopuses in the ocean. They terrify me."

"Me, too," Mindy said, shivering. "We found book after book in the library telling of monsters attacking old-time sailing ships. Then somewhere I saw that the reason we don't hear about attacks on modern ships is that propellers of steamships make so much noise they frighten the animals away."

"That is true, I guess," Robin said, "but, Mom, here is a story in *True* magazine, July, 1965. There are pictures—look at them!—of animals said to be sea monsters. They're something! They were taken by a French photographer off an island near the coast of Queensland, Australia. So, you see, people are seeing big, strange sea animals in places besides



Loch Ness. It could well be Pacific Point, California—and I believe we'll get a picture right off Wolf Point, if we try hard enough."

"Mr. Smith never said that what he saw was a plesiosaurus, did he?"

Robin's face fell. "No. He did describe the thing, though, and anyone smart enough to look up 'plesiosaurus' in the encyclopedia can tell it was one. Mom. . . ."

"Yes, Robin?"

"Do you know that the person who discovered the very first skeleton of a plesiosaurus was a girl about the same age as Mindy and me? Listen to what Mr. Denny says."

"All right, Robin, but it seems to me that Mr. Denny is getting a bigger play in the newspapers and on radio than Mr. Smith is."

"Yes . . . maybe," Robin agreed thoughtfully. Then her face brightened. "He does mention Mr. Smith pretty often in his articles, though."

Mindy got up from the table and carried their plates over to the sink. "I thought he sort of put Mr. Smith down in that newspaper article. He kept saying, 'Mr. Smith *says* he saw. . . .' Well, if Mr. Smith says he saw something, he did see it, and that's that."

"You couldn't be more right," Robin answered. "Mr. Smith *did* see it. I didn't notice any 'putting down' in the article, though."

"Maybe that's because you're what Kevin said you were—sort of goofy about everything Mr. Denny says or writes."

"Oh, Mindy, I am not. Anyway, Mom, do you want to hear about that girl?"

"Indeed I do."

"All right. Here goes:

"Mary Amming, a young girl who was born in 1709 in the little village of Lyme Regis on the English seacoast, discovered the first plesiosaurus skeleton. It was identified as having lived in Upper Cretaceous times . . . some ten million years ago. Mary was twelve years old when she found it, and it made her famous all over the world. Mary found it while helping her father, a fossil collector, in his work. When she found this complete skeleton of a plesiosaurus, she decided to make fossil collecting her lifework, too.

"What do you think of that?" Robin cried. "Jeepers, I wish I could have been that girl!"

"I don't wish you had been," her mother said. "You would have lived nearly three hundred years ago. I don't know what I'd ever do with a three-hundred-year-old daughter. Right now, you'd better practice being the person you said *last* week you wished you might have been, Florence Nightingale."

"Oh, Mom, I did forget all about the hospital. Look at that clock! Will you please run us out to

the hospital? We'd never get there in time now with our bikes."

"I will, and I'll pick you up promptly at one o'clock."

Mindy clapped her hands. "Mrs. Kane, you're absolutely the greatest!"

"If anything important happens when we're at the hospital, promise to let us know, will you, Mom?"

"I will, Robin."

At the hospital, when Robin was arranging a book cart to take around to the patients, she heard two of the doctors talking.

One of them said, "I played golf yesterday out at Pebble Beach with one of the teachers from the high school. He said he was concerned about Mr. Smith."

"Something about that sea monster he's supposed to have seen?" the other doctor asked.

Robin listened shamelessly.

"Yes. Smith hadn't expected all the notoriety it's been getting. To tell you the truth, I don't think all the publicity that man Denny has cooked up has done our village much good."

"I'm not too sure myself. Logan Denny, though, is a famous writer—reputable, I'm sure—and if he thinks there definitely is a strange, maybe prehistoric, animal out there in that deep water off Wolf Point, who am I to say there isn't?"



"You're right. I'm only a doctor, too. Mr. Denny has done some research, and I guess we should take his word."

"Maybe so. I kind of liked our sleepy little village the way it was, though, before all these people swarmed in—reporters, scientists, photographers, tourists, writers."

"It's been a three-ring circus, for sure, since this all began."

"Especially since there hasn't been one more sign of anything unusual in the water off the Point or anywhere else in the ocean near our beach. It seems to me. . . ."

The men walked on down the corridor out of Robin's hearing. She was upset by what she had heard. *I wonder, she thought to herself, how many other people are thinking and saying the same things. You'd think all those quotations from magazines in the newspaper story and that picture in Time— Well, I'll have to tell Mindy what I heard those two doctors say.*

The girls finished their work at one o'clock. Mrs. Kane picked them up and took them home to change their clothes. Then she gave them a quick snack, and they were off across the highway to the beach and up to their own private lookout.

Here they found Michael and Kevin, feet propped up, backs against a boulder—watching.

"Has anything happened yet?" the girls asked excitedly.

"Not much. A lot of people seem to be cooling off," Michael said. "I'm not too sure I'm not myself."

"Yeah," Kevin echoed. "You'd think, if Mr. Smith really did see that thingumajig, it would have shown up again by this time."

"Why, Michael Hunter! Kevin Kane!" Robin exploded. "I'm ashamed of both of you. Don't you remember in Tom Dinsdale's book *Loch Ness Monster* he told of how long *he* kept watching? *Years!*"

"Yeah," Kevin said, "and the pictures he took, when he did see something, were from at least a thousand feet away. They were so blurred nobody could say for sure—"

"Oh, yes, they could, Kevin Kane. The Royal Air Force of England analyzed his films in detail. Its experts came up with a statement that what Tom Dinsdale saw was live and real. They said he had proved that what scientists had thought could not possibly exist really did exist. If you don't remember the research we did at the library, you can read it again in Mr. Denny's story in the newspaper this morning."

"Logan Denny! Logan Denny! Logan Denny! That's all you think about. Mr. Smith avoids that guy as though he had bubonic plague."

"I've told you over and over again—Mr. Smith is so retiring and modest that he doesn't want anyone trying to prove he saw anything unusual."

"Anybody like you, Robin, you mean. He sure runs the other way now when he sees any of us," Kevin taunted.

"People who really try to do something worthwhile for the human race aren't looking for the praise or the cheers of the multitude," Robin said loftily. "Mr. Smith isn't. I'm not. Neither is Mindy. I don't think you and Michael are, either. We must stand for what we think is right."

Kevin stretched his legs and yawned. "Well, la-di-da! Get a soapbox, Robin."

"Let's stop arguing," Michael suggested quietly but firmly. "We're all jittery with this waiting and watching."

"Then all I can say," Kevin answered, "is that there aren't nearly as many people around here as before. I'd like to get back to sailing and surfing myself. Even if Frank and Art keep making fun of the whole thing in their lousy way, I'm beginning to think they weren't far wrong when they said Mr. Smith saw seaweed instead of a monster."

"Kevin Kane . . . you're . . . you're a . . . heretic!"

"Holy Toledo!" Kevin shouted, rolling on his back, laughing. "Do you hear Robin, Mike? I don't knock my forehead on the ground every time Logan Denny

passes by and that's 'heresy.' You're getting theology mixed up with paleontology. Anyway, Mike feels the same way I do."

"Hold on there!" Michael protested. "I never said that. I can speak for myself, Kevin. The only thing I said was that people are losing interest and that I myself am not so keen. Let's leave here . . . maybe go over to our house . . . give this place a rest for a while. My car is parked at the bottom of the hill. Let's go."

Kevin jumped to his feet. "I vote for that."

"It's a swell idea," Mindy said. "Please, Robin."

"Please!" Michael echoed.

"All right," Robin agreed, smiling. Then she added a little wistfully, "I don't feel quite right about leaving. Supposing. . . ."



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## *A New Friend*

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### 5

AS THEY CROSSED the wide white-sanded beach at the foot of Ocean Avenue, Robin saw Logan Denny. She waved, but he didn't see her. He was in earnest conversation with—of all people—Frank Benson and Art Nicholas.

"Did you see who Mr. Denny was talking to?" she asked Kevin.

"Yeah. I wonder what he wants with a couple of characters like those two."

"They're probably running down Mr. Smith," Mindy suggested sadly.

Robin stopped still. "You can be sure they're not up to any good. Do you suppose if I'd go back and kind of hang around near them I could hear what they're saying?"

"For Pete's sake, why do you care what they're

saying?" Kevin burst out. "Mr. Denny would never pay any attention to them."

"You wouldn't eavesdrop, Robin!" Mindy said, shocked.

"Well, I *don't* want them telling lies about Mr. Smith."

"Since when have you been his guardian," Kevin asked, "self-appointed and unwanted?"

"Come on, Kevin," Michael told him, "I think Mr. Smith can stick up for himself. Mr. Denny is probably doing what any good reporter does—trying to hear all sides of a story—maybe getting a line on something new. Anyway, Robin, you can be pretty sure the Point won't go unwatched, with that Denny around."

"It isn't the same," Robin protested. "I've sort of made it a Hunter-Kane Agency case, and I have a feeling—"

"Let's please forget it for now, Robin," Mindy begged. "Here's Michael's car. We'll stop and tell your mom you and Kevin are coming home with us. We'll pick up your swimsuits and scuba outfits. You can stay for dinner, too. Manuela's always asking us to bring you home."

"I'll love it!" Robin said eagerly, then added soberly, "How you can ever hope to be a good detective, though, Mindy, and pass up opportunities—"

"Maybe she doesn't want to keep her nose to the

ground twenty-four hours a day," Kevin suggested.

"Oh, let's stop squabbling," Michael said impatiently. "See what I mean about thinking of something else for a while? Here, Robin, get in this side." He held the car door open. "If fur flies, you'll be out of Kevin's reach."

Robin laughed. "Maybe I need Kevin to keep me in line. Maybe I have made Mr. Smith's business too much my business. Maybe Mr. Smith doesn't like it. It is a project Mindy and I are working on, Michael."

"Okay," Michael said and stepped on the gas.

Mrs. Kane wasn't home when they piled out of the car, so Robin went around to her father's studio in back.

"Your mother went to the post office to mail some of my comic strips and to send off some of her driftwood figures to San Francisco," her father told Robin. "She said she'd stop at the grocer's and that we'd have short rations tonight—maybe hot dogs."

"She'll be just as glad, then, that we're going to be away for dinner, Kevin and I. Mindy and Michael have invited us to dinner at their house."

"Some of Manuela's good Mexican food. I envy you."

A shrill whistle came from The Huddle, next door.

"It's Kevin," Robin said. "He wants me to hurry. We're taking our diving suits. We're going to Pirate's Point. In a minute!" she called to Kevin. "I'm com-

ing. You get the stuff we'll need.

"Bye, Daddy. I don't know when we'll be home. If Mindy's father is there, he may show us a movie."

"We can't go to the Hunter home dressed like this," Robin told Kevin when she left her father's studio. "You know how formal everything is there. Mindy never ate dinner in her life dressed in shorts and a T-shirt the way I do most of the time. I'm going into the house and put on a dress. You'd better change, too."

"Heck, Robin, it's no fun *ever* going to that joint."

"It's not a joint. It's perfectly beautiful."

"It sure isn't a home."

"Talk lower. We don't want Michael and Mindy to hear us say anything like that."

"Heck! They're way out in Mike's car. Why can't their house be like everybody else's house? It's no wonder Mike and Mindy hang around our house all the time."

"I *love* having them here."

"Me, too, but—"

"And the reason why they have everything perfect all the time and Michael and Mindy have to stay dressed up when they're home is that Mr. Hunter is an important producer and has to entertain big stars and important executives in his home. Why, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if we'd go there now and find—I don't know who, but somebody big!"

"Holy cow! If there's a chance of that, you couldn't get me within a mile of the place."

Robin laughed. "There's not a chance, so let's hurry and get changed."

They ran into the house and upstairs.

"Do you want me to find a shirt for you, Kevin, and socks?"

"No, thanks. I'm not going to wear socks. Loafers, maybe, but no socks!"

Robin, delighted that Kevin was going to change at all, made no answer. She hunted out stockings for herself, and her yellow flats to go with the yellow shift she took from the closet. She put her new yellow swimsuit on under it. Then she gave her face a quick once-over, lined her lips with the pale lipstick she had lately acquired, took one last look in the mirror, and went downstairs.

"Did you get my diving suit and tank?" she called to Kevin.

"I did, but I forgot my swim trunks."

"Wear some of mine," Michael said. "Time is passing, with all this dressing up. You looked all right the way you were. What'll we do with the mutt?"

Tramp, who had rushed up from nowhere when he heard the car arrive, sat on the ground in front of the backseat door, panting and thumping his tail.

"He wants to go with us," Robin said. "He *always*

wants to go with us, no matter what."

"Nine times out of ten he gets his wish," Kevin said. "This time, no, fella! I'm sorry, but this time, no!"

"Oh, Kevin," Robin began.

"Let him come along," Michael said.

"Not this time," Kevin insisted. "He's not being mistreated. We're all pushovers where he's concerned. This time, no!"

Kevin picked Tramp up in his arms and carried him back to his father's studio. "Keep the door closed, Dad, please," he said, "till we have a chance to get away."

He gave Tramp a loving pat and hurried away.

"Strong-minded Kevin!" Robin said. "I couldn't have done it."

"You could if you remembered how he nearly drowned the last time we were at Pirate's Point. It's deep there, but Tramp doesn't know the difference."

"Isn't this fun?" Mindy asked, clapping her hands as they started around the drive that circled the beach at Clearwater Cove, where the Hunter home stood.

Robin's breath caught, as always, when they neared Mindy's home. It was indescribably beautiful . . . like the loveliest of stage settings. The low, white stone and timber house was circled with roses,

white stocks, blue delphiniums, and Shasta daisies, all in neat, precise, perfect order. Back of the garden, a wall of saplings dripped with scarlet fuchsias.

Michael stopped his car on the white sand drive, and they all went up the wide stone steps and across the tiled terrace.

Manuela opened the door—dark, smiling, gracious, holding out both hands in welcome.

“It is good that you come. It doesn’t happen nearly often enough. You will stay for dinner?”

“They will, Manuela. Isn’t it exciting?” Mindy said, her eyes dancing. “We’re going scuba diving at Pirate’s Point. Then we’ll come home for dinner. Oh, I wish Daddy were here!”

“He is, honey.” A tall, tanned man pushed open the sliding glass door back of Manuela. It was easy to see where Mindy’s golden blond hair and dark eyes came from. “And here is someone I brought home with me,” he added.

“This is Rip Harrington. Rip, these are Mindy and Michael’s best friends . . . good, good friends.” Mr. Hunter presented a shy, dark, slender boy about Michael’s age. He was fairly new in pictures but a great hit in Mr. Hunter’s latest movie.

They all shook hands. Robin, for a change, was blushing and hesitant. “Heavens, what will I ever say to him?” she whispered to Mindy.

“Whatever comes into your mind. He’s just like

any other boy. Imagine he's Michael. Rip asked Daddy if he could come here sometime, and apparently this is the time."

"He's not a bit like Michael," Robin continued in a low voice while Kevin and the young actor were talking. "I don't see how you ever treat actors and actresses like normal human beings. I could never get used to such famous people. Can we go diving right away?"

"In just a minute. What is Kevin saying to Rip?"

"Have you heard about our sea monster?" Kevin asked.

"I thought we weren't going to call it that," Robin said quickly. "He'd have to have been asleep the past few days not to have heard of it."

"I have heard about it. That's one reason I jumped at the chance to come home with Mr. Hunter when he asked me."

"For all anyone has seen of it since Mr. Smith's first glimpse, you're wasting your time," Kevin said. "The excitement has died down, and the Pacific Point sea monster—I beg your pardon, Robin—the Pacific Point mysterious sea creature must have gone home."

"Mr. Smith hasn't given up," Mindy said. "Other scientists haven't either."

"They're sure cooling off then, because there's practically no one on watch."



"I haven't given up," Robin said. "I should be over there right now watching. I expect to hear any minute that what Mr. Smith saw has been seen again. Wouldn't it be terrifically awful if it happened and I wasn't there?"

"A real catastrophe!" Kevin said, pretending to cry. "Let's go to Pirate's Point and churn up the water there with a little diving. That'll keep it away till you get there, Robin. Do you like scuba diving?" he asked Rip.

"Yes, but I don't have an outfit with me."

"We can take care of that," Michael told him. "Did you bring swim trunks?"

"I did. Shall I go and put them on?"

"Yes. Then come on out to the boathouse and get suited up for diving. I think we'll have something to fit you."

Rip bounded up the staircase and was back in three winks.

At the end of the dock, Michael's powerboat waited to take them to Pirate's Point. In the boathouse, they put on wet suits over their swimsuits. The water was only about sixty degrees, and wet suits were needed for warmth and to let them stay in the water for the hour their compressed-air tanks would allow.

Rip tried a suit, then, mask and fins dangling from his belt, helped Kevin ease the air tanks gently into

the boat. Michael set a pail of chopped fish on the floor of the boat. "Chum," he said, "for the dolphins, if we see any, and I hope we will."

"Michael said we'd better stay in reasonably shallow water," Robin whispered to Kevin. "Maybe Rip hasn't done much diving, and we don't want him to feel embarrassed about it."

"That's right!" Kevin agreed wholeheartedly. "There'll be plenty of things to see in the rocky crevices and coral beds down around twenty or thirty feet."

When they were all aboard and settled, Michael started the motor and opened the throttle wide, and they roared away to Pirate's Point.

It was a beautiful day, with a blue sky almost cloudless. Long, easy swells rocked the boat and continued toward shore, to break in foaming surf against the rocks.

Robin sat in the stern and swung a bare leg over the edge of the boat, trailing her foot in the water.

"Pull your foot in!" Michael ordered.

It was Michael's "to be obeyed" voice, and Robin responded instantly.

"Why?" she asked. "There aren't any sharks around here."

"Barracuda," he answered shortly. "They might storm the boat, and you wouldn't have a foot left to pull in."

Robin shuddered. "There aren't any barracuda around Pirate's Point, are there, Michael?"

"No. There's too much vegetation. They're cowards . . . afraid of octopuses hiding in the seaweed."

"I'm afraid of octopuses, too," Mindy said. "You're funning, aren't you, Michael?"

"About octopuses, yes . . . except the miniature ones in the crevices. About barracuda right here in the open sea, no. Big octopuses keep to the deeper water."

"Then you don't need to be scared, Rip," Robin said reassuringly.

"Thanks." He grinned. "I'm not keen to run into an octopus or a squid. Do you suppose one of those might be what your teacher saw?"

"Oh, no," Robin said, shaking her head. "The thing he saw had a long neck."

"Could it have been a porpoise upended in a dive?" Rip persisted. "I saw a picture of one that might easily have been mistaken for a neck sticking out of the water."

"You'd better not try to find an explanation that would satisfy Robin, Rip," Michael said. "Robin's sold on the sea monster idea. Say, look at that school of porpoises!"

"How could we miss?" Kevin said. "They're almost human. Watch them grin!"

"Throw them some chum, Kev," Michael said.



Kevin dug his hand into the smelly mess of chopped fish and watched the porpoises, very close to the boat, gracefully leaping and diving. "They're merry little souls, aren't they? Always a wide grin."

"They're not really grinning." Michael explained. "It's the shape of their mouths. But they are the friendliest animals in the ocean. Just look at that one! I think the beggar knows me. Watch him now. I'll slow down."

Michael slowed, and the porpoises put on an act, rising, dipping, flipping, dipping, rising again. The show went on as long as the chum lasted.

"It's all gone. There isn't any more," Kevin told them and turned the bucket upside down and held it out to show them. "Whew! I don't envy you your smelly feast. Watch 'em scatter!" he chuckled. "Like a bunch of kids. Here we are at Pirate's Point, Mike. We drifted right up to it."

Michael dropped the anchor and watched it catch on the rocks. "Everybody out! Do you want me to help you fasten your tank?" he asked Robin.

She shook her head, already strapping it, then she put on her fins and mask.

"I'll take some help," Mindy said. "Maybe Rip needs a little. You'll test the air lines before we go over, won't you, Michael? Look down below us. It's so clear—and the color!"

Rip declined help with his harness, then looked

down, at Mindy's bidding. "It's neat, isn't it? About thirty feet of water? Is this as deep as we go?"

*How about that?* Robin asked herself. *We're trying to hold back because of him. Amateurs think all you have to do is jump in and let the air tanks take care of you.*

Slowly they crawled down the boat's short ladder into the water. Then they thrust their fins hard to propel themselves down to the rocky bed.

Easily, happily, they glided through the water, past waving coral fans and ribbons of kelp, over small, colorful sea anemones and masses of bright vegetation.

It was a beautiful moving color picture. Small striped, spotted, gaily colored fish swam by them, not at all curious about, or frightened at, the queer black-suited animals who flipped their fins and sent air bubbles to the surface.

Michael poked a little octopus curled in a small cavern and watched as it filled the water around it with an inky black cloud that hid it.

Quietly they swam through sargassum weed and in and out of channels. Though Rip seemed to be handling himself with ease, they still wanted to stay close to him, in case he needed help.

*Swimming down here, breathing so easily in this strange, strange world, is the greatest fun I know,* Robin thought.

She watched Michael reach into a seaweed-tasseled cleft in a rock, pull out two crabs, and stuff them into the specimen bag attached to his weighted belt. *They're to take home to Manuela, she thought. We may have them for dinner.*

Suddenly she was hungry . . . very hungry. She wasn't sorry, then, when she saw Michael draw his hand across his throat in a cutting gesture. *That means "end of dive,"* she thought and let herself float to the top.

They all surfaced not too far from the anchored boat. In a short time, they had kicked off their fins and drawn off their face masks and were on their way home.

A long line of awkward pelicans flew over them as Michael drew up the anchor, gunned the motor, and let out the throttle all the way.

"Did you have fun?" Robin asked Rip.

"Did I?" he asked, laughing, and wiped the water from his face. "Next time we'll try deeper water?"

"Look who's talking," Robin said, then covered her mouth, embarrassed. "I mean . . . well, I've never gone a lot deeper myself than we did today, and I've been scuba diving a long time."

"Try it deeper sometime," he said with a chuckle. "You might happen to like it."

After dinner Robin had reason to remember this conversation.

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## *“Remember Moby Dick?”*

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# 6

BACK AT the lovely Hunter home, the young people changed their clothes and filed into the dining room.

Manuela had decorated the long table fiesta style, with gaily colored napkins and a long red linen cloth. The bright blue peasant china contrasted with wooden-handled flatware.

The food was served family style: spicily fragrant Mexican dishes handed around from one person to another.

“Mmmm-mmm, delicious!” Robin said as Manuela set a platter of crispy *empanadas* on the table in front of her. “I was hoping you’d have these.” She bit into the puffy turnover of chopped lamb, raisins, and piñon nuts.

“Mamacita taught me to make them,” Manuela said, pleased. “Everything I know about cooking I



learned from her. I can't remember a time she hasn't cooked at Rancho Lucia."

There were bowls of colorful salad, tangy with red and green pepper strips, steaming frijoles, mounds of tortilla-wrapped chicken, sourdough bread, crusty and brown, and mugs of pungent hot chocolate laced with mint.

There was little conversation or any other sound—just the soft clink of knives and forks on plates, and sighs of appreciation as the food disappeared.

"How about it, Manuela?" Mr. Hunter asked. "May we take our ice cream into the projection room?"

When Manuela smiled agreement and spooned the black walnut ice cream into patterned blue and red bowls, Mr. Hunter added, "I have something special to show on the screen. You come, too, Manuela."

"I suppose about the last thing you want to see is a movie," Kevin told Rip, laughing. "It's like the old saw about the postman taking a walk on his day off."

"I'll bet I don't see a tenth of the movies you kids see," Rip answered. "When I'm not working, I have to catch up on studies. This weekend has been keen."

"The picture I'm going to show you," Mr. Hunter continued, "is really a clip from a picture—something, though, that may be of particular interest to you just now. It's new. Not even the people who

played in it have seen this part of it. I won't even tell you the title."

They crossed the hallway, went down a few steps into a small auditorium, and took their seats.

Mr. Hunter nodded to the man in the projection cubicle back of them and sat down. The lights were lowered.

Across the wide screen, dark water rolled in toward the audience—rolling, rolling, to break in foaming cascades.

"Good! A sea picture!" Robin whispered to Mindy. Involuntarily she put up her hand to ward off the onrush of pictured waves that seemed to break all around them.

Far off, the long swell of dark water rolled endlessly toward them, eerie, wrapped in fog, eternally dark.

Gradually the surface of the water faded, and the onlookers were in the semidarkness of mid-depth, a changing landscape of waving kelp, sargassum weed, and coral fans. Shoals of fish sped in and out among the weeds. In the background, great shadowy, indistinct shapes loomed.

A rocky ledge filled one side of the screen, where huge spiny lobsters moved, reaching their claws to pull their awkward bodies from cleft to crevice. Long-legged crabs tiptoed, their snapping claws extended to snatch bits of food from the water around them.

Close to the ledge, which fell off suddenly into very deep water, a mass of seaweed floated. From an opening in this mass, the cruel jaws of a moray eel emerged to seize an unwary shellfish dangling from the ledge above.

"What a terrible place!" Mindy whispered. "Look, Robin, there's a scuba diver! See him coming into view over there at the right?"

Robin, hypnotized by the creeping, crawling, darting, ever changing, semidarkened world before her, did not answer, but Rip gasped, started to speak, choked off, and said nothing.

Robin saw the bubbles rising from the swimmer's helmet, saw his black fins propel him slowly through the water. She saw him push aside fronds of giant fern and rubbery kelp, saw him appear, then disappear, slipping gracefully and confidently in and out. She saw him—

"Watch out!" she screamed.

"Cool it!" Kevin whispered hoarsely. "It's a picture, Robin, remember? Anyway, the moray eel is gone."

Startled, Robin looked around her, then back to the picture to watch the swimmer disappear behind a jutting hillock of rock. All around, awesome creatures wove in and out, creatures with tooth-studded jaws, squat anglerfish, and long, sinuous water snakes.

A huge manta ray flapped its big wings and settled toward the depths.

Suddenly a cigar-shaped body came into view, a body with an arrowheadlike tail fin and powerful arms. . . .

"A giant squid!" Michael called out. "A killer!"

"There's the scuba diver again!" Robin screamed.

"Oh, Robin, he's trailing a buddy line," Mindy cried. "Look what's at the end of it—a girl!"

Into the half darkness of the nightmare water, the slender young scuba diver swam sturdily, looking back to beckon to the girl at the end of the tightly held safety line.

Paralyzed with fear, the young people watched, their eyes fastened on the two young swimmers gliding into certain peril.

Unaware of the danger lurking beyond the huge mass of seaweed, the young boy prodded it with his spear.

"Don't do that!" Robin shrieked, then covered her mouth with her hand.

The water around the boy was immediately filled with inky murk. Through it they could see a long, circling arm wrap itself around the defenseless girl and the squid's questing tentacles draw her body closer, closer, closer to its powerful beak.

Then a long gasp went up from the watchers. With nerve-racking slow motion of underwater movement,

the boy drew a sharp knife from his belt, then slashed at the frightful animal's arm and severed the powerful tentacles. He tore the girl free, put his hand under her chin, and began to tow her limp body.

Scissors kicking with his fins and stroking with his free arm, he moved slowly toward the surface and safety. Below him, the wounded animal beat the water with its crippled tentacles, then dropped, writhing, into the depths.

There was a brief glimpse of the swimmer at the surface as he pushed the girl into a boat and climbed in beside her.

Robin and her companions, drawn to their feet by the hideousness of the unfolding spectacle on the screen, cried out in amazement as the boy drew off his mask.

*The boy was Rip!*

Emotionally exhausted, Robin and Mindy dropped into their seats. The lights flashed on. Rip sat there grinning from ear to ear.

"Was the girl hurt?" Robin asked.

Rip shook his head, grinned even wider.

"Did you both get away from that hideous place all right?" Mindy asked.

Everybody laughed. The horror diminished. Still the young people sat.

"Some picture, wasn't it?" Mr. Hunter asked.

"Is *that* the way the ocean looks, down deep?"

Robin asked slowly, unbelievably.

"Yep!" Rip answered.

"I think it was too dangerous—far too dangerous for you and that girl—" Mindy began.

"Nope!" Rip said. "It was just about as dangerous as sitting right here in this projection room."

"With all those horrible things around you and . . . and that murderous squid?"

"Phony. The squid was, anyway, Robin . . . all managed electronically and hydraulically."

"It couldn't be!"

"Remember Moby Dick? Made of rubber."

"Those horrible things, all sizes and shapes, swimming around you in the water. They weren't phony."

"It was double shooting. Simple." Rip laughed. "The fight with the squid was shot when I was in a big tank, then the film was superimposed on an existing background scene taken by a team of underwater photographers."

"Whew! Is that a relief!" Robin gasped.

Suddenly she put her hands in front of her face and collapsed in her seat. "I just thought of something," she said in a low voice. "Rip, what a bunch of bigheads you must have thought we were today when we were showing you some of the techniques of scuba diving—you!"

"There's always something a guy can learn," Rip told her. "Forget it. I'm the one who should be

apologizing. It *was* fun, pretending a little. To be real honest, this afternoon was about the only real fun I had with that picture. When they were shooting, I kept thinking all the time, 'Suppose this were for real!' Ugh! Say, Robin, did you notice anything in the very first part of that clip? The part where there were some shadowy shapes in the background?"

"Yes?" Robin asked.

"Didn't it give you any ideas? Nobody knew what those shapes were. I asked the scientists who shot that part of the film. They didn't have the answer. Maybe . . . just maybe . . . one of them may have been that thing Mr. Smith saw. If there ever was a never-never land, where nobody knows for sure who the inhabitants are, it's the ocean from mid-depth down. So one of those shadows could have been a long-necked something or other."

"It could have been," Robin said thoughtfully. "You know, it just could have been!"

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## *Hoax!*

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# 7

NEAR THE END of the church services the next morning, there was an air of confusion.

As the Kane and Hunter families were leaving, the bell started to toll jerkily, excitedly.

Simultaneously the fire siren shrieked. People ran, shouting and pointing, down the hill toward the ocean.

Without stopping to think, Robin, Mindy, and the boys took off with the crowd.

On the beach, men, women, and children stood in noisy groups, looking out to sea.

Way out toward Wolf Point and close to the opposite shore of the landlocked cove, a dark object protruded from the water!

"That's it!" Robin cried hysterically, beating the shoulder of a stranger standing next to her. "It's



superfantastic, but it's there! Can someone possibly get to it before it vanishes? Who has a camera?"

"There's a guy over there with lots of camera equipment," someone told her. "He's been shooting ever since I got here."

It was Logan Denny. He had cleared a ring around himself and set up his tripod. Flourishing his hand to hold people off, he kept a finger of the other hand on the button of a movie camera and ground out footage.

"Oh, Robin," he called, "keep out of range of my camera! It's the sea monster, sure as you're living. It's the plesiosaurus! We knew it would happen, didn't we?"

Robin stood back obediently, nodding her head enthusiastically. She and Logan Denny and Mindy and, most of the time, Kevin and Michael had believed when so many people had been skeptical. Now Mr. Denny would have a real scoop. Other cameras began to show up, but Mr. Denny was there first.

"There are some guys over there in a Marine Laboratory boat, ready to take off!" someone in the crowd cried. "There goes an order from the Coast Guard to clear all other boats from the water!"

"Golly! The boat with the scientists is almost ready to go!" Robin cried.

"Eh? What's that?" Logan Denny called. "A boat going over to that plesiosaurus? They'll scare the

thing away, and I'll never get my pictures! I was just adjusting my telescopic lens. Hey, you!"

He ran down to the shore, where the men were loading the last of the gear into their boat—diving gear, it seemed.

"Hey! Don't take that stuff with you! Above all, don't go down into the water! It'll disappear! I *must* get pictures. Hey, you! Let it alone!" Mr. Denny called frantically. "Give me a chance to get some pictures!"

"Mr. Smith is with them," Robin said, her voice hoarse from shouting. "I can see him, Mr. Denny. He knows what is best."

Mr. Denny seemed to get little comfort from this. Red-faced and sputtering, he boxed his camera, folded the tripod, and stalked away.

Kevin had pushed through the crowd to join Robin. Michael, Mindy, and Rip were right behind him.

"Hi!" she said. "Isn't this the greatest?"

"That's Mr. Smith, our science teacher, down there, Rip—the one with the glasses," Kevin explained. "Jeepers, I'll bet he can hardly wait till the boat gets going. Why is Logan Denny so steamed up, Robin? Somebody has to go out and get that thing . . . at least get as near as possible and get a real look at it before it disappears."

"If these darned church bells and sirens don't

scare it off, I don't know how a boat could," Michael said.

"Maybe the thing's deaf," someone called, and everybody laughed.

*How can anybody make jokes at a time like this?* Robin thought. She ran her hand over her unruly brown curls and grinned at Rip. "I know I'm acting crazy, but aren't we lucky to be here? The whole state must be here! Look at the crowd!"

"It's neat!" Kevin cried. "But goll! Why don't they get that boat started?"

"They're waiting for someone, I guess," Robin said, straining her eyes to see. "Oh, yes, some men with grappling hooks. Now maybe they'll go.

"Get started!" she yelled. "Get started! Go!"

People around her laughed.

"I don't care," she told them. "It's the greatest thing that's ever happened. Mr. Denny! Say, where did he go?"

"Into the air," Kevin answered. "The big sorehead got mad because that boat was going out to that animal. He wanted more pictures first. Gosh! Look at its head bobbing! Neat!"

"What will the men do when they get there?" Michael asked.

"Snare the thing some way?" Mindy asked. "Bring it back with them?"

"That thing? That big thing? In such a little

boat?" Michael asked. "That boat's no bigger than our motorboat. The problem probably won't come up. They'll scare it off with the boat's propellers. I'm kind of on Logan Denny's side. I think it's better to get a good picture."

"There they go!" Robin shrieked. "Yell, Mindy! How can you keep still? Yell! Do something!"

"I'm speechless," Mindy whispered. "I keep thinking if I speak out loud I'll scare it."

"Don't worry. You won't. It isn't moving a bit, except its neck and head. Just look at it, Mindy. Mr. Smith must be almost out of his mind with excitement. I guess everybody will believe him now, won't they? You just bet your life they will," Robin answered her own question, her eyes dancing. "They're closing in! There's the last private boat heading this way at full speed . . . a couple of men or boys in it. They're obeying the Coast Guard order to clear the Cove. Just look at Mr. Smith's boat go! Golly! It's almost there!"

Nearer, nearer, nearer the boat drew to the animal strangely fixed in the water, unmoving, undisturbed.

Robin's eyes wrinkled with concern. "Do you think it may have been wounded, maybe paralyzed? Mr. Smith said an animal coming up from great depths could be injured by water pressure. Do you think those men from the laboratory are going right up to the animal?"

"They're sure getting nearer . . . real near," Michael said quietly.

"I wonder . . ." Rip said. "There's something queer!"

"Yeah," Kevin agreed.

"What do you mean?" Robin asked, worried. "They're practically on top of it now. They've stopped the motor. The boat's drifting. . . ."

"There goes somebody over the side," Kevin shouted, "into the water. I hope they anchor that animal and hold on to it till they can get a net big enough to tow it over here."

"They've found something in the water," Robin said slowly. "They put it in the boat. I wonder what everybody seems to be arguing about. I can see Mr. Smith shaking his head. He looks angry about something. I *wish* they'd use a loudspeaker."

"Yeah," Kevin agreed, "so we'd know what's up."

"Maybe the men in the water won't do what Mr. Smith wants them to do," Mindy suggested.

Robin nodded. "Maybe so. Oh, what *is* happening now?"

Robin's voice rose. "I can't stand not knowing. Hey, they've got something on the grappling hooks. Jeepers, the head and neck have disappeared. Oh, I hope it didn't dive right down into deep water."

"It disappeared, all right," someone in the crowd said, "into the boat. They have it, whatever it is.

We'll soon know. They're starting back."

Robin ran down to the very edge of the water. Kevin, Michael, Mindy, and Rip followed.

"The boat's racing back," she cried. "Look at the white foam back of it. There's Mr. Smith sitting in the prow. He's holding on to something."

"Oh, dear!" Mindy cried. "He has his head down. Something's wrong!"

"What could be wrong?" Robin cried. "We saw them pull something into the boat with the grappling irons. The animal's body may have been small . . . practically all head and neck. . . ."

Kevin shook his head. "No. Remember the way Mr. Smith described it when he first told us? 'Large, shadowy body, rough brown skin, shadowy tail?'"

"Some kind of funny business has been going on," Rip said. "It reminds me of the squid you saw in my picture . . . phony!"

Robin looked at him, aghast, her blue eyes wide open, her face whitening. "What do you mean?"

"Watch the men," Rip answered. "They're beaching the boat. The crowd's milling around. Mr. Smith just threw something out. I smell a mouse, Michael."

Michael clenched his hands. "I smell some kind of a low-down, contemptible trick."

"Let's get closer. Everybody sounds mad about something. I can't hear what anybody is saying," Kevin said.

"Try and see what Mr. Smith threw out of the boat," Robin cried.

"It's a dummy! Rip was right!" Kevin shouted. "It's not a real animal at all. Somebody planted a dummy down there. Jeepers, why? Wouldn't any dunce know he'd be found out?"

Rip shook his head. "Not if the scuba divers who planted the animal there planned to go back later and sink it. They just missed on their timing . . . maybe didn't expect that boatload of scientists to go over there so soon."

"Yes," Michael said. "Remember that boat that was the last one to come in out of the water when the Coast Guard ordered it cleared? But who? Why?"

"That's the question I've been asking myself, Michael," Mr. Smith said sadly as he pushed people aside and left the bedraggled mass lying where he'd thrown it. "Why?" he repeated, half to himself. "Why would anybody do such a thing?"

"Maybe you know the answer yourself," a voice called from the crowd. "Maybe you know why clamps from your laboratory were found on the dummy."

Robin's mouth fell open. That voice—was it Frank's voice that said that dreadful thing? She couldn't see him.

Her face flushed with anger as she shouted, "Don't





anybody ever say Mr. Smith had anything to do with that fake! Don't anybody dare say it! He's the most . . . most honest person in the whole world. It's terrible, that's what it is—terrible!”

Mr. Smith, who had started to leave the beach, turned back.

“Please let me handle it, Robin,” he said kindly.

His head went up proudly, defiantly, as he spoke to the crowd. “I had nothing to do with this hoax. However, the person who imitated a plesiosaurus should have a medal for realism. I thought it was the animal I had sighted before. It was a very clever production, very clever indeed. Perhaps we had better disperse now and give the real animal a chance to come back.”

A cheer went up from the high-school students Smith had taught, who loved and respected him, but there were uneasy groans from many adults.

The teacher went off alone up Ocean Avenue.

“Oh, dear, how could anybody have thought that of Mr. Smith?” Robin said tearfully.

“Most people don't like to be taken in,” Michael said wisely. “Some of them have to find a fall guy. I suppose the man who accused Mr. Smith thought that the teacher would do anything to prove he really saw something in the Wolf Point cove.”

“That's an awful thing to think. Everybody knows Mr. Smith!” Robin cried.

"Not the way his pupils do," Mindy said. "I guess we'd better go on home. Mr. Smith suggested it."

"I may go on home now," Robin said, "but there must be some way to show how honest Mr. Smith is. Mindy, if our agency *ever* had a case, we have one now. I won't rest till— Say, I wonder. . . ."

"If you're wondering about what I think you are," Kevin said, "forget it. Neither Frank nor Art could have been the one who accused Mr. Smith. They couldn't have been mixed up in that phony sea monster business, either. Didn't you hear them down there after the laboratory boat came in? They sure raved about whoever planted that dummy. I never saw anybody madder than they were."

"But Frank did say clamps from Mr. Smith's laboratory were on that dummy. . . ."

"Are you sure it was Frank talking?"

"Oh, Kevin," Robin said in a discouraged tone, "it sounded like his voice, but I'm so confused."

At the Kane home, Robin's mother made lemonade for everybody.

Poor Tramp ran out, head up and tail up and ears cocked to meet them, sensed their mood, and crept along close to the ground, wagging his tail feebly.

Robin scooped him up in her arms and buried her face in his rough coat. If tears found their way down her cheeks, a loving dog licked them before they fell.

"This is Rip Harrington, Mom," Kevin said. "What a heck of a time to choose for a visit. He's an actor in the movie Mr. Hunter finished last week."

"We're sorry about what has happened; sorry it couldn't have been a happier time to come to Pacific Point," Mrs. Kane said. "Would you like a glass of lemonade?"

"I sure would, thanks. What a swell crowd of kids down there at the beach. It was almost worth what happened, to see what they think of their teacher. I'm glad I was here."

"We're glad, too," Mindy's father said. He set his glass on the kitchen table. "Thanks, Mrs. Kane; that hit the spot."

"It was quite dramatic, wasn't it, Rip?" he went on. "The crowd's contempt for whoever tricked them and the pupils' affection for their teacher. Your mother and father and I, Robin, just got in on the last of the excitement. What do you suppose will happen next?"

"We'll keep right on hunting for the animal Mr. Smith saw," Robin said resolutely. "This only makes us all the more determined. We'll find the person who made that dummy, too. We'll prove that Mr. Smith had nothing to do with it, won't we, Mindy? We'll never give up till we do."

"That's the spirit." Mr. Hunter applauded. He put one arm around Mindy and the other around Robin.

"These girls are the Hunter-Kane Detective Agency," he told Rip, "and it's a darned good one. Wait till I tell you some of the things they have done."

Quickly he recounted the part Mindy and Robin had played in capturing El Gato, and the Phantom, and the ghost at Glengary Castle, and the man on Olvera Street, and the skyjacker in the clouds.

"Whee-ew!" Rip whistled. "It looks as though Mr. Smith's case is in good hands. What's your next move?"

"I think we should all go out to the ranch," Mr. Hunter said.

"Oh, no!" Robin protested. "We have to be on watch all the time. We can't leave a case like this."

"Not even"—Mr. Hunter's eyes twinkled—"to go out to Rancho Lucia and visit Nugget?"

"Is Nugget there?" Robin asked eagerly. "Have you brought the palominos back from location?"

Mr. Hunter nodded his head. "They came back when we finished Rip's picture."

"Then you know Nugget?" Robin asked Rip, her face glowing. "He's my very own horse. Did you know that Mr. Hunter gave him to me? I have the framed ownership paper in my room."

"I know he's your horse," Rip said, smiling, "and I think Nugget is swell. It's no wonder you're so crazy about him. I'd hoped to have a chance to see him again before I go back to Hollywood today."

"Which is exactly what you will do, too," Mr. Hunter said. "I'll take everybody out there with me right now. I'll see that you get to your plane in time this evening, Rip. Who's coming with me?"

His eyebrows went up, questioning, as he turned to Mr. and Mrs. Kane.

"We wouldn't miss the chance," they answered.

"May we take Tramp?" Amy begged.

"Of course, Sugar. He's already sitting in the car."

"Robin?" Mr. Hunter asked. "Everybody else wants to go. Will you make it unanimous? Welcome Nugget home from location?"

"You know how I want to see him," Robin answered. "I can hardly bear to be separated from Nugget for such a long time. May we come back tomorrow morning real early?"

"If you want to come back then, yes," Mr. Hunter answered. "Michael, will you please telephone Manuela?"

"Oh, Daddy, let's take Manuela, too," Mindy said and added to Rip, "Manuela's ancestors owned Rancho Lucia and all the land around it for miles. They raised cattle and corn, and their vineyards covered the foothills."

"What happened?" Rip asked.

"Expenses outran revenue," Mr. Hunter explained. "Manuela was the only one of the family left—Manuela Isabella Maria Lucia Inez Merendez Avila.

That happens to be her full name."

Rip whistled a low whistle. "Holy cats, Mr. Hunter, has she ever used all of that long name?"

"Only when she was baptized, I guess," Mindy said, laughing. "But she's proud of it. I'll phone and tell her to be ready, Daddy."

"Say, Mr. Hunter," Rip said as they waited for Mindy to come back, "I keep thinking every time something happens—and things seem to happen all the time around here—why not put all this in pictures? There's enough material to make half a dozen movies. Take the detective agency of Robin and Mindy alone. . . ."

"How about making a movie of Mr. Smith's mysterious animal when it shows up?" Robin suggested. "That story will be a lot more important than anything Mindy and I've done."

"I'm expecting you to play a part in it when that time comes," Mr. Hunter teased. "We'll wait and see. Is Manuela coming, Mindy?"

"She sure is!"

"Then, shall we go? We can have lunch at the ranch."

Mrs. Kane handed her husband the duffel bag that held the Kanes' overnight needs. "I have to keep it packed and ready," she explained. "To my family the words 'Rancho Lucia' mean 'let's go.'"

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## *Amy's Clue*

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# 8

WHEN THE KANE station wagon drove through the wrought iron gateway of Rancho Lucia, Robin was glad Rip was in their car.

It was fun to see a favorite place through the eyes of someone else. Robin loved the sprawling, time-worn old adobe house as much—well, almost as much—as she loved her own home on the beach.

Fat Mamacita, the housekeeper, heard the car and stopped rocking on the wide veranda to come waddling along the path to meet them.

Felipe, her orphaned grandson, hurtled past her with his playmate Jeff, both boys singing out, "Hi!"

Perro, Felipe's dog, barked a challenge to Tramp, who jumped from the car, barking, to meet boys and dog.

As the visitors climbed from their car, the fra-

grance of jasmine blossoms mingled with that of yellow roses growing over the old brick entrance wall. Robin sniffed ecstatically. It was the unmistakable scent of the ranch, blended with that of peppery food from Mamacita's kitchen, the new-mown grass of the patio yard, and the faint smell of the old stable down the flagstone walk.

Overhead, the sky was filled with downy white clouds trailing whispers of fog. On the green hills in the distance, white-legged Hereford cattle grazed. Here and there, little long-legged lambs, born out of season, followed their mothers' heels.

Mr. Hunter's land, with pastures and growing corn, snuggled close to the foothills, then ran westward up the slopes, to disappear over the crest of the low mountains and extend downhill to the old ocean port town of Breakwater.

To the south his land reached as far as one could see, then north to the mouth of the San Antonio River.

Robin watched Rip stand entranced with the sights, sounds, and smells. A big smile spread over his face, and, seeing it, Robin clapped her hands.

"You haven't seen but a tiny part of it," she said. "Wait till Mindy's father shows you some of the ranch. You won't begin to have time to see all of it. This is Mamacita," she told Rip and hugged the roly-poly little woman. "Mamacita, this is our new



friend, Rip Harrington. He's an actor. Think of that!"

Rip winced and raised his arm, as though he would fend off a blow. "Don't, Robin. It's probably a strike against me. She's seen enough of actors and actresses out here. How do you do?" he greeted her.

Mamacita's broad grin of welcome put the boy at ease. She pumped his outstretched hand vigorously. "You're a friend of Mr. Hunter, you're a friend of Mamacita. I'll call José."

She raised her voice, and a browned old vaquero came out of the house, just as Mr. Hunter's car arrived with Amy and Manuela.

José tucked in his Spanish red shirt and tightened the silver buckle on his belt. "*Buenos días! La casa es suya!*"\* He swept his hand to include Rip and the others from the Kane car.

Mr. Hunter set the brakes and jumped out of the car, smiling.

"Your dad loves to come out here, doesn't he?" Robin whispered to Mindy. "When he's here, or when he's at our house to swim and eat with us on the patio, he's just as human as my own dad."

"What do you mean, 'human'?" Mindy asked, bristling.

"Oh, don't get mad," Robin said quickly, "but the first time I ever met him, it was just after you moved

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\*"Good day! The house is yours!"

to Clearwater Cove. I was scared to death of him. He seemed so businesslike and . . . so important! Now. . . .”

“Now what?” Mindy asked, her eyes twinkling.

“Now I’m not scared anymore. I love him almost as much as my own dad. Oh, Mindy, just look over there in that corral!”

Robin put two fingers in her mouth and whistled. A big silver and gold horse lifted his head, listened for a moment, snorted, then came galloping down the field.

In two flying leaps, Robin was at the corral fence, with Rip close behind her.

“Oh, Nugget!” she called, leaping over the bars and putting her face close to the beautiful horse’s golden coat. “Oh, Nugget, did you miss me?”

He shook his silver mane and bobbed his great head.

“Do *you* think he doesn’t understand what I say?” she asked Rip. “Kevin teases me; says he doesn’t.”

“Horses are pretty smart,” Rip answered. “Nugget’s the smartest. I rode him, you know, in the parade in the picture we just made. He was loaded down with silver-covered leather, with heavy, flapping tapaderas. I could hardly get my toes into them. It didn’t bother Nugget one bit, did it, fella?”

Rip ran his hand down the horse’s neck and patted him. “He’s a real trooper, Robin.”

Nugget put his head close to Robin's face, then nosed at the pocket of her shirt.

"He wants sugar," Robin said, laughing. "Greedy! I don't have any. Amy, please bring me some sugar lumps from the kitchen."

Mr. and Mrs. Kane, Mr. Hunter, the two little boys, and Amy had followed Mamacita and José over to the corral fence.

"You don't need to go to the kitchen, Amy," Mrs. Kane said. "At the last minute I tucked a few lumps into my purse. Here they are."

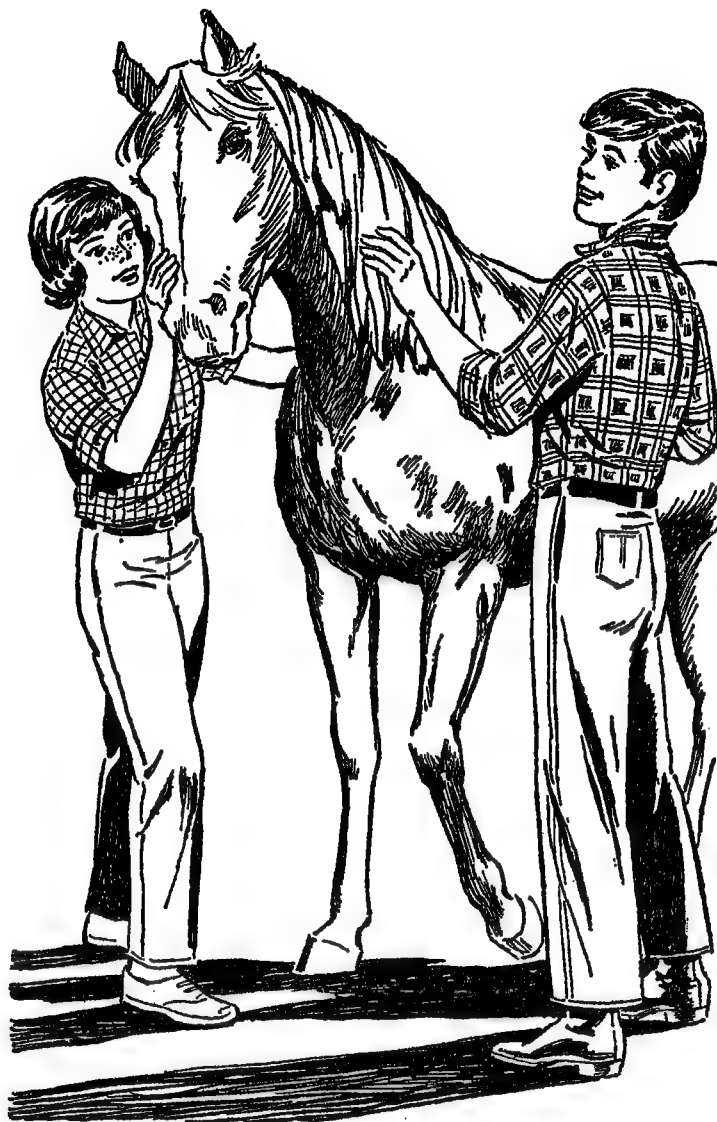
"Then I get to feed Nugget," Amy said and held the sugar on the palm of her hand.

The other three palominos, Sunshine (Mindy's pet and favorite mount), Sutter's Gold, and Lucky, crowded around Nugget, edging the good-natured horse aside. The cow pony stood near, eyes begging. Amy fed them all.

"The first time I saw the four palominos," Rip said, "was when they were in the Rose Bowl parade. You kids were riding them, weren't you?"

He looked around at Robin, Mindy, Kevin, and Michael.

"Yes, they were," Mr. Hunter answered. "That was a long story, the adventure that ended in that parade. I still don't like to think about it. The detective agency of Hunter and Kane had a pretty close call that time."



"I'd like to hear about it," Rip said. His gaze went admiringly to the two girls who *lived* adventure instead of acting it out on a screen. "I'll tell you right now, though, that I sure envied the kids riding those palominos! Then to think I had a chance to ride Nugget in the picture I made!"

"We got lots of other horses and ponies," Felipe said, waving his hand toward the far field. "Cow ponies like Bueno. I like cow ponies. Me and Jeff get to ride them."

"Me, too," Amy spoke up. "Sugar and Bueno are the ones I like best. Sugar was named after me. It's my nickname," she explained to Rip. "Sugar likes to eat sugar, too."

"What horse doesn't?" Kevin asked. "I could even eat a lump now myself. Got any more, Mom?"

Mrs. Kane shook her head.

"I forget," fat Mamacita said, and, gathering her bright skirts around her, she hurried to the house. "Everybody come and eat!" she called back. "Lots of food. All ready in—what you say?—a jeefy. Come, now!"

The U-shaped adobe spread its aged brown ells like arms around a wide-spreading live oak tree. Low, homely, and inviting, its veranda hung with trailing baskets of vines, its brick-paved yard lined with trailing, colorful Lantana, the old house beckoned visitors to its shady interior.

They went in through the back door to the kitchen, where a worn, black, wood range was covered with pots and pans. Enticing ribbons of steam rose from under their lids.

Rip rubbed his stomach in anticipation. "We tried to show something like this in that old cafe on Olvera Street in a picture. The steam coming from the pots wasn't from food at all—just props. I can't wait to get at your food, Mamacita."

"Frijoles, tacos, tamales, dried peach pies!" Mamacita teased. Even better than eating the food herself, Mamacita loved spooning it onto the plates of guests.

"May Jeff eat with us?" Felipe asked, tugging at Mamacita's skirt.

"Sí, Felipe," she answered, smiling, "if you set a place at the table for him."

Jeff was Matt's son—Matt, once a trusted ranch hand at Rancho Lucia, who had been unjustly accused of horse stealing and vindicated through Robin's and Mindy's persistent efforts to detect the real thieves. Matt now operated his own small ranch. Mamacita loved his small motherless *muchacho*, and he was Felipe's inseparable playmate.

"Me and Jeff is building a tree house way over the hill," Felipe explained. "We gotta get back at it right away."

Amy's face fell.

Robin knew her young sister had planned to spend the afternoon with the smaller boys. It was clear they didn't have room for a girl in their building program.

"Mamacita," she asked, "instead of eating here, do you think Mindy and Amy and I could take some tortilla sandwiches and ride up into the foothills overlooking the ocean?"

"Tortilla sandwiches!" Mamacita snorted. "You go for picnic, I fix you a good one. Mrs. Kane, you please stir this—slowly, please—while I fix lunch for the girls."

"Oh, Robin," Amy whispered lovingly to Robin, "you knew Jeff and Felipe didn't want me. Anyway, I'd a million times rather go with you and Mindy. I can ride Bueno. Mamacita, let me help you pack the basket; may I?"

"*Si*," the cheerful housekeeper answered. "Where did Manuela go?"

"Into the living room," Mrs. Kane answered. "She's serving some wine to Mr. Hunter and my husband. Manuela is happiest there, where her old furniture is, and where the portraits of her ancestors hang on the walls. Go and take a peek at them, Rip."

"Yes, do," Robin urged. "They're fabulous. Such silks and satins and laces—old Spanish grandes who once lived right here at Rancho Lucia. What are you and Michael and Rip doing this afternoon, Kevin?" she asked, changing the subject as Rip left them and

went on into the living room.

"Riding over some of the range with Mr. Hunter and Dad," Kevin answered. "Rip has to catch the plane at six eighteen at Monteleone. Mike and I will run him over there."

"We'll be home from our picnic long before that," Robin said.

"Yeah," Kevin said with a wink at Robin. "I know why you want to go up on that bluff for your picnic."

"You do? Aren't you smart!" Robin said, blushing pink. "Why?"

"It overlooks Wolf Point and the cove, doesn't it?" Robin nodded.

"Enough said," Kevin teased. "You can't get that dark water and that animal over there out of your mind, can you?"

"How can you expect her to until that mystery is solved?" Mindy asked defensively. "Not just the mystery of that thing Mr. Smith saw, either."

"I know. You want to know who planted the dummy," Kevin said. "How you expect to get a line on that from gazing across to the cove, I'll never know."

"Things seem to happen to Mindy and me when we want them to happen," Robin said.

"You're telling me," Kevin hooted. "Sometimes when you don't want them to happen, too, like— Say, Robin, where are you going?"



"To saddle up Nugget," Robin called back, laughing. "We'll tell you more about it when we get back. Don't overeat, Kevin. No cow pony could take your weight right after one of Mamacita's lunches."

"Ha!" Kevin shouted after Robin. "Who's Fatso in Dad's comic strip? Not me!"

His insult was lost on Robin. The minute Nugget came into view, she couldn't see anything else or hear anything other than his glad nickər.

"You know we can't possibly see the neck and head of an animal sticking out of the water way off near Wolf Point, Robin," Mindy said as they rode through the gate.

"A head and a neck—what are you talking about?" Amy asked, riding close behind Robin.

"Oh, nothing, Sugar. I only thought if we were going to ride and find a picnic spot, we might just as well go to the top of that cliff."

Robin smiled mysteriously.

"I thought, too," she added, tugging at her belt, "that I might just as well bring the binoculars along. They're powerful enough to see a gnat's eyebrow as far away as Wolf Point."

"Oh, Robin, you planned it all the time, even before we left for the ranch, didn't you?"

"Of course I did, Mindy. You don't think I could go away at this critical time and forget *everything* about Mr. Smith, do you? Forget the fact that people

are beginning to think he never did see that animal . . . that some people are even so crazy as to think he may have planned that fake? Do you think I could forget that?"

"Once you start working on one of our cases, you have a one-track mind, Robin. This is something I should never forget. I'll never be anything but a junior partner in our agency, because I *do* forget. As soon as I came in sight of the ranch, everything else went out of my mind. Not till I heard Kevin say he knew why we were going to picnic on the cliff did I even think of Mr. Smith and that sea animal."

"I wish I could put it out of my mind. I truly do."

"You can't, Robin," Amy said. "I'm glad you can't. You always solve cases. I wish I could help."

"We'd better watch out," Robin told Mindy, laughing, "or we'll have a rival detective in our midst."

"You're making fun of me, of course," Amy said. "But, just the same, I would like to help. There's something I forgot to tell you."

"What is it?" Robin asked quickly. "Something about Mr. Smith?"

"Not exactly," Amy answered slowly. "At least, I don't think so. It's about those two big boys that you and Kevin and Mindy and Michael don't like."

"Frank and Art?"

"Mmm-hmm."

"For heaven's sake, what is it?" Robin asked. She reined in Nugget, reaching over to pat his neck. Back of her, Sunshine and Bueno halted. "What is it?"

"I saw them take something out of the boat, a bundle of something. Maybe they made the dummy. . . ."

"They couldn't have," Robin said. "Kevin told us Frank and Art were very angry about what had happened."

"This was before they acted so mad," Amy said. "They acted sneaky when they took that bundle."

"Then why didn't you tell about it long before this?"

"Because after what Kevin said, I thought he was sure they were good guys."

"What did the bundle look like?"

"Black and crunched up and sort of rubbery," Amy said.

"It *was* the diving suits!" Robin exploded. "Frank and Art planted that fake sea monster and were trying to get rid of it, when they heard the boat on its way toward them. They scrambled out of their suits and— Golly! They were the ones in that boat, Mindy, the last boat that came racing in! They *had* to recover their suits. How could they have done it without anyone else noticing them?"

"I suppose," Amy said slowly, "it was because

everybody else was looking at the dummy and not at Frank and Art. Does it make a lot of difference, Robin? Did I help any by telling you?"

"Yes," Robin said thoughtfully, "I think you did, Sugar. You'd have helped a lot more if you'd told us about it sooner. Now what shall we do, Mindy?"

"Not a thing till tomorrow," Mindy said practically. "One thing is sure; we can't go back to Pacific Point before evening, because there isn't a soul at the ranch who could drive us. Everyone is out on the range."

"So we do nothing?" Robin asked.

"Not necessarily. We go on our picnic, don't we, Sugar?"

Amy nodded vigorously. "I don't want to miss the picnic."

"You jump to conclusions," Mindy went on. "If Amy saw diving suits, how do we know they belonged to Frank and Art? Right away you have them planting that phony animal, Robin."

"They're the likeliest prospects I know. Sugar, did you possibly watch to see where Frank and Art went? Did you see them carry the bundle away?"

"Yes, I did. They were kinda showing it to that author—the one you talked to so much, Robin."

Robin gave a big sigh of relief. "Jeepers, I'm glad you saw that, Sugar. If they showed the bundle to Mr. Denny, then everything is all right. They were

giving him some more dope about the fake monster for his newspaper stories, of course. Wheeew! You had me scared for a little bit, Sugar. Always remember, after this, to tell me every single thing you see when Mindy and I are trying to solve a mystery, will you?"

She touched Nugget's side, and they all started along the trail again.

"I will, Robin," Amy promised. "Isn't it pretty scary in this part of the woods?"

"Not particularly, why?"

"Indians used to have a trail through here. Now these branches are so thick they hit me and Bueno in the face when you ride through."

"I'm sorry. I'll be more careful. This *is* the same trail the Indians used to take their possessions into the hills . . . way back, you know, when the Mexicans drove them from their land."

"There used to be bears here. Are there any bears now?" Amy asked in a small voice.

"There certainly aren't any here now," her sister told her.

"I don't think there ever were," Mindy said. "Where did you hear that, Sugar?"

"José told me. It's true, too, because José said he knew a man who met a bear up in the hills one time. The bear was coming right toward him, walking on its hind legs. Do you know what that man did?"

"No," Mindy and Robin said.

"José told me the man just opened up his arms real wide and went toward the bear and grabbed him around the middle and squeezed and squeezed till he squeezed the bear to death!"

The girls burst into laughter. They laughed so loud that the sound echoed back from the walls of the gulch where they were riding.

"Did you believe that wild story?" Robin asked.

"I believe every word José tells me," Amy said emphatically. "José has known all the woods and mountains around here a lot longer than you have . . . even Mindy. You better not laugh at me anymore, either, 'cause if you do, I'm not going to tell you what else I saw. I mean about Frank and Art."

Robin jerked Nugget's rein so hard that he stopped short and almost stumbled.

"What else did you see?"

"I saw them start up the hill toward the valley road," Amy said, "before we left the beach and went home and Mr. Hunter asked us if we wanted to come out to Rancho Lucia. Frank and Art still had that rubbery bundle."

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## *Another Sighting*

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# 9

OH, DEAR!" Robin cried. "Mindy, we have to turn right around and go back to the ranch. If we'd only known about Frank and Art before, Sugar. . . . I can't imagine why you didn't tell me."

Amy's eyes filled with tears as she buried her head in Bueno's mane. "I didn't know it was so important. Every time you and Mindy start working on a case, you go off and whisper and don't tell me anything about it. Anyway," she sobbed, "you said a minute ago that it was all right, if Mr. Denny knew about it."

"Oh, that was before we knew what was in the bundles. . . ."

"We don't know now," Mindy said.

"Oh, yes we do! I told you the bundle was diving suits and Frank and Art planted that phony animal. Why, they must have fooled even Mr. Denny! We'd

better get back to the ranch as fast as we possibly can and tell Sheriff Jackson to send out a search party for those two . . . thieves . . . con men . . . bad guys . . . sneaks . . . crooks. . . . What shall we call them, Mindy?"

"That's just it. That's why we can't tell the sheriff to hunt for them. There isn't anything we can accuse them of doing. Sheriff Jackson would hoot his head off if we asked him to catch up with Frank and Art without any evidence."

"I suppose you're right. I suppose, too, that if they were on the valley road hitchhiking, they'd have been picked up long before this. They could even be in Mexico by this time," Robin added ruefully. "I'm certain, though, that they were the ones who did that awful thing to Mr. Smith."

"I think so, too," Mindy agreed. "They were the only people I knew who hated Mr. Smith."

"You're right. This is one time we sure slipped up on an important clue. I'm ashamed of that. Oh, please stop crying, Amy. If I was cross, I'm sorry. I've had so many things on my mind."

"I know that," Amy said, sniffing. "I'm not crying because you were cross. I'm crying because I wanted to help so much and all I did was spoil everything."

"Oh, no you didn't, Sugar." Robin looked back at her sister and smiled. "You told us something important. It was something we should have seen



for ourselves. It wasn't your fault."

"Does that mean we can still have our picnic?" Amy asked. "Does it, Robin?"

"With reservations," Robin said thoughtfully and urged Nugget on.

"I don't know what that means, but we're on our way," Amy said happily.

"It means, Sugar, that we don't *know* Frank and Art got away. They may have left the valley road for some other highway. They surely did if they saw our car or Mr. Hunter's. They could turn up anywhere."

"Here?" Amy asked. "Oh, dear!"

Robin laughed. "Not anyplace around here, Sugar. There's nothing to bring them up into the woods. They want to put miles between themselves and Pacific Point."

"That is," Mindy reminded her, "if they had a reason to try to escape. We could be wrong. We could go back to Pacific Point tomorrow and find them down at the beach surfing."

"So let's forget it for now—that's what you mean, isn't it, Mindy? All right. Let's forget it for now. This sure is a trail nobody uses very often—on foot, maybe, but not with horses. Watch out for the branches!"

"I can see the ocean!" Amy sang out. "See it, Robin? We can stop here now, can't we?"

"We *may*, Sugar."

"Oh, bother! I guess when you were ten years old you didn't always know 'may' from 'can.' Let's have fun from now on, please . . . may we, Robin? And no lessons?"

"Jeepers! Now and then I do sound like a parent, don't I, Sugar? You bet your life we'll try and have fun from now on. Isn't this a honey of a spot for a picnic—a ledge on top of the cliff? Look across the ocean!"

The girls dismounted, letting their horses graze on the green ground cover and low-growing leaves.

"It must be way past time to eat," Robin said.

Amy groaned. "My stomach says it is."

"Then we'll see what Mamacita put in our saddlebag." Robin lifted it off Nugget's back and handed it to Amy. She held her face close to Nugget's head, loving the warm, horse smell of his golden coat. It was hard to believe that so beautiful a creature really belonged to her. "Darling Nugget!" she whispered in his ear.

Amy had spread a red and white checked cloth on a flat rock near the cliff's edge.

"Tortillas with ranch ham in between," she announced. "Avocados with chicken salad stuffing—that's your favorite, Mindy, isn't it?"

"Are there any enchiladas?" Robin asked. She loved the bite of the green chilis. "And tamales for you, Sugar?"

"Mamacita remembered everything we like," Amy called as she unwrapped package after package of food. "I'm so glad we came for a picnic. Robin, look at that little chipmunk! He smelled food, but he's too timid to come and get it."

She nipped off a corner of a tortilla and tucked it under the rock where a tiny brown nose had peeked out. A bolder squirrel ran up to the morsel, bushy tail fluttering, couldn't pry the food loose, and ran, bright-eyed and greedy, across Amy's lap. She laughed out loud as she fed him. All little wild things were Amy's instant friends.

"Mamacita even remembered sugar lumps for Bueno, Nugget, and Sunshine," she said happily.

"Now, Sugar, honey," Mindy said, "you've fed all your animal friends. How about eating something yourself?"

"They were hungrier than me," Amy said seriously. "Anything that's left I can give to the birds."

Gulls wheeled and whimpered about them. Below, nearer the water, a pelican darted into the waves to fill his funny pouch with a wriggling fish. Far off, across the cove and beyond Wolf Point, the girls could hear the faint barking of seals and sea lions on Seal Rock.

The salty tang of the sea whetted young appetites, and everything tasted wonderful.

Robin had taken the Indian blanket from under Nugget's saddle, and the three girls lay on it, cooled by the upwind from the ocean.

Sun, wind, fleeting clouds, cries of gulls, and far-off barking of seals; soft twittering of land birds in the manzanita and scrub oak and, down below, the beat of the waves as they slapped the shore—all these closed drooping eyelids, and the girls slept.

That is, Mindy and Amy slept.

Robin tried, but always, in the back of her mind, there was the call of dark water off Wolf Point . . . the longing to take just one more peep through the binoculars. Quietly she sat up, took the glasses from her belt, and held them to her eyes, tensely watching the moving, changing surface of the far water.

She saw nothing unusual.

As she tugged at the binoculars case to return the glasses, her foot struck Mindy's. Mindy sat up, startled, then laughed.

"I might have known it, Robin. You had to steal a look, didn't you?"

"Yes," Robin said sheepishly, then added sadly, "I didn't see a thing."

"If we'd walk down the trail a little way, we could see better," Mindy said.

"Now we've waked Amy," Robin said, "and I did promise to think of nothing but the picnic."

"That's all right," Amy said and jumped to her

feet. "I wasn't asleep at all; just pretending; just lying there happy. You really want to go and get a better view of Wolf Point, don't you, Robin?"

Robin nodded her head. "I really do, Sugar."

"Then, why don't you and Mindy go down the trail to a place where you can see better? I'll feed the birds and the lizards and the chipmunks and whoever else is hungry, even the gulls. I'll fold up Nugget's blanket and put it back under your saddle, Robin."

"Will you really?"

"Mmm-hmm. And you don't have to hurry back, either, because I'll pick up some of the rocks around here for Kevin's collection. I saw some I know he doesn't have."

"She's a real honey," Mindy told Robin as they went down the trail.

"That's how she got the name 'Sugar,' " Robin said proudly. "Shall we go up on top of that rise—that big rock off the path? It's the highest place around here."

"If we can get to it through this underbrush," Mindy said. "I wish I had my boots. Some of these bushes have thorns."

"And the bushes are so dry, but the ground is all squishy."

"Maybe there's an underground spring of some kind coming down from that mountain range."

Mindy squinted. Back of the foothills, far in the

distance, the snow-topped peaks of the Santa Lucias sparkled in the sunlight.

"I wish the boys were here," Robin said, "with a machete. They'd cut a path through here for us. Wouldn't Rip love it here, too? Even better than riding the range, I'll bet. Be careful, Mindy!"

Mindy's foot had slipped on the wet leaves. "Gosh, that hillock we saw seems to be getting farther away. Do you have your compass, Robin?"

"Of course. I never stir a step into the woods without it."

"Then you know where we are. Aren't we getting pretty far away from Amy? Won't she be frightened?"

"Frightened by what? Amy isn't afraid of horses or little ground squirrels. There aren't any wild animals in this part of the forest anymore, except maybe an occasional deer, and Amy loves them. Once we get up on that rise, Mindy, and have a good look around, we'll go right back to Amy and the horses."

"And the ranch."

"Of course!" Robin was puffing a little as they started the steep rise. "Here, I'll give you a hand, Mindy. There we are! Now for a good squint through the high-powered glasses."

The vast expanse of the Pacific spread out before the girls, as far as they could see, from whitecaps foaming onto the beach to the far distance, where water and sky became one.

Robin looked across to the dark and mysterious water below Wolf Point, whose frightening depths no man had ever explored.

Suddenly, with her eyes fixed on the spot where the animal had been seen, she started and dropped her binoculars.

"Did you see something?" Mindy asked eagerly. "May I look?"

"I can't be sure . . . *I'm so terribly anxious to see something!*"

Mindy picked up the glasses, and her dark brown eyes strained as she held them fixed on that far-off changing water—looking, looking.

Finally she lowered the binoculars. "I didn't see a thing. I don't think you can see a thing, either. I don't think any living person is ever going to see a thing in that water. I'm not even sure Mr. Smith *ever* saw anything, either, Robin. I'm pretty sure this is one case we're going to have to mark 'unfinished' in our file back at The Huddle."

"I don't think we'll mark it 'unfinished,' Mindy," Robin said solemnly. "Mr. Smith *did* see that thing. If we only have patience and faith in him, we'll see it, too. *I think I just did* . . . maybe only a glimpse. Oh, Mindy, it couldn't have been because I've been hoping with all my heart to see it. It *is* far away, but I honestly think I saw it. Here, take the binoculars again, please. I'll close my eyes and make a wish!"

"All right, Robin, if you want me to do it."

Mindy put the glasses to her eyes again, then, with an expression of awe, handed them back to Robin. "You really may have seen it! *Something different stuck its head out of that water.* Do you see it now?"

Robin looked and let out a war whoop. "There *is* something moving over there, moving along slowly. Oh, I wish we were on the other side of the cove, Mindy! Let's go back to the ranch and to Pacific Point as fast as we can get there. Maybe the boys will be back from the range by the time we get to the ranch. Jeepers, Mindy, they'll be out of their minds when we tell them! Let's get out of here. Hurry!"

She started down the incline, hurrying toward the trail that would take them to the horses and Amy.

Suddenly a sharp scream stopped them dead still.

"It's Amy!" Robin cried. "Did you hear her?"

"Help!" they heard, faint and far away.

"We're coming, Sugar," Robin screamed at the top of her voice. "Hold on, Amy! We're coming!"

The cry came again. "Help!" Fainter this time.

Frantically Robin answered, "We're coming, Sugar! Hold on—we're coming!"

Her voice ended in a frenzied shriek as the ground gave way, and they fell, crying out in terror—down, down—to land on the floor of an underground cavern, in dark, dank silence.



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## *Bad Luck and Good Luck*

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# 10

THE IMPACT of the fall knocked the breath out of both girls. Robin was the first to recover. A sharp pain in her ankle brought her thoughts racing back. It was swelling rapidly.

An even worse pain ran through her head—Amy! Amy was up there and in danger . . . some unknown danger!

There beside Robin lay Mindy, white-faced and still. “Mindy!” she called frantically. “Mindy! Oh, Mindy, answer me! Are you alive?”

Mindy groaned, shook her head, and sat up. “Where are we?” she asked, confused. “Oh, Amy!” she gasped. “Amy screamed!”

“I know, I know,” Robin moaned. “Mindy, I can’t move. I don’t know whether my ankle is broken, but I can’t move. We *have* to get to Amy. Look at the

walls of this place! They go straight up! There's not a place to get a toehold to climb, and *I* can't climb, anyway. *What are we going to do? What is happening to my little sister?* Why, oh, why did we ever leave her? Oh, Mindy, what can I do? I wish my dad were here. Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!"

Robin was the strong one. Robin was the one who always took command of any situation. Robin was the one who kept Mindy's spirits up, who stood behind her and found a way out of any danger. Now it was different. Robin was hurt—in pain. Robin was almost hysterical, frantic with fear about Amy. Now Mindy must be the strong one.

"First thing," she told Robin, "let me see your ankle. I'll try not to hurt you." She bent down close to Robin and gently lifted her right leg and straightened it. "Groan all you want, Robin. There's not much light from that hole up there where we fell. I can hardly see. I don't think, though, that there's anything broken. There isn't any blood. The skin isn't broken." With calm born of desperation, Mindy ran her hand over the badly swollen joint. "It's maybe a bad sprain. Can you stand it if I try to bind it? *We have* to get out of here somehow."

"*We have to get out of here right now!*" Robin said and tried to stand, but she fell back, with a cry of pain. "Mindy, let me lean on you. Hold me up! Oh, I can't stand at all. What will I do? *I have to go to*

Amy. Can you hear her at all now, Mindy?"

"No." Mindy shook her head. "She's probably riding away on Bueno. Robin, I'm sure I did hear horses' hooves the second before we fell. It's possible that the horses were frightened and bolted. That's what happened, Robin. Don't worry!"

*"Don't worry? When my ten-year-old sister . . . my darling little sister, Amy . . . screamed for help?"* Mindy, do you honestly think it was only because the horses bolted that she screamed?"

"I honestly do," Mindy said soothingly. "See here, Robin, I'll use my bandanna—tear it into strips. I'll try and bind your ankle as tightly as I can."

Mindy, working skillfully as she had been taught by the Red Cross, tore her large red bandanna into wide strips, then wound them as tightly as possible around Robin's ankle.

"Does it hurt awfully?" she asked, her dark eyes filled with pity.

"Not . . . too . . . much," Robin answered courageously. "It *is* feeling better. You're a good nurse."

"And you're a good patient. The best ever. Robin, I'll lean down, and you catch hold of my shoulder. Now, see if you can stand."

*"I will stand! I will! I have to stand. We have to find a way out of here right away! There! I can stand up. I can move. Am I hurting your shoulder, Mindy?"*

"Not a bit. Put your foot forward now. Can you walk?"

"Take your arm away, Mindy. I'll try. *There!*"

Robin limped a step or two. "I *can* make my leg go! Now, Mindy, how do we get out of here? There must be some way other than climbing through that hole. We can never do that—never." Robin's voice broke.

With Mindy holding her arm, she limped across the floor of the cave. It was dark and wet, with serrated layers of rock which rose for about three feet and then faded into a firm clay wall, impossible to climb in any way.

Wholly sick at heart, Robin told herself firmly, *The first thing you have to do is to get back up on that trail. This is the only way to help Amy. Make yourself think she was only frightened by the horses. Keep this firmly in mind.*

Her eyes darted around the semidarkness of the cave. Nothing here—nothing there—or was that dark mound on the floor an opening where a spring trickled in, a place a person just might widen to find a way out?

Robin limped over closer to the dark place near the far wall. She leaned to look at it, then raised her head, amazed.

"Here are the suits, Mindy—the diving suits. Frank and Art must have hidden them here!"

She held the neck of one of the suits nearer the faint beam of light from above. "See? Frank's name is on this tape. Oh, Mindy! That's why Amy was screaming! Frank and Art saw us and were desperate to get away! *What have they done to Amy?* Amy! Amy! Amy! Help! Help! Oh, Daddy! Daddy!"

Mindy joined in her cry. "Amy! Amy! Amy!"

There was no answer.

There was no way out of this cave . . . no way except to scale those impossible walls!

As long as Robin lived she would remember the next hour. It was the most desperate hour of her whole life. Her mind raced from one possibility to another, from one imagined fate of her golden-haired sister to another.

Hard upon each thought came the sense of her own guilt. Why, oh, why had she been so oblivious to everything but that animal Mr. Smith saw as to leave a little girl alone in the woods? In vain she tried to comfort herself with the thought that there never had been a time when a person of any age was not wholly safe anyplace on Rancho Lucia.

Only facts counted now. Amy *had* been left alone. Amy *was* in danger. Amy had screamed, and nobody had answered her call for help. Instead, Robin, full of her own importance, had left her alone.

Robin sat down wearily on a jutting rock, put her head in her hands, and prayed. She prayed hard and



promised that if she could find a way out of the cave and find Amy unharmed, she would never, never forget a responsibility again.

"Right now, we can keep yelling," she told Mindy.

"Help! Help! Help!"

They kept this up till their voices were hoarse croaks. From the fading light in the hole above, Robin knew the day was growing late. Were they going to stay in this place forever? Again her eyes went up and down the sides of the cave, in a last frantic search before the light failed.

Again she and Mindy called, but little sound came from their swollen throats. There was no way out . . . *no way at all!*

No way out? Then how did Frank and Art get down here to leave those suits? They didn't fall. They didn't drop the suits down. There hadn't been a hole in the ground until Robin and Mindy went through it.

Robin roused herself, got painfully to her feet, and began an inch-by-inch check of the cave again. Was that a thin line of light circling a place on the far wall?

Had the changing sun, which showed less and less light through the opening above, penciled a possible way out on that far wall?

Robin hobbled across the rocky floor, reached toward the wall, and traced the line of light.

*It was there, all right!* It circled a huge boulder which had been shoved against the cave opening.

Robin found a crevice and peeked through. Unhappily she saw that the ground sloped toward the cave opening, wedging the boulder. Frank and Art had rolled down. She put her shoulder against it and pushed. She stood shoulder to shoulder with Mindy, and both pushed.

The rock didn't move.

"That's the way they came in," she told Mindy hopelessly. "That's the way they closed it off."

"And that's the way we'll die," moaned Mindy. "Die the way miners die in mines, and nobody will ever find us, until someone discovers our bones."

"Mindy," Robin said confidently and solemnly, "*we are going to get out of here!*"

"We are if you say we are, Robin."

Suddenly Mindy's face brightened. She listened hard. She shook Robin's arm. "Do you hear something? Horses? Voices?"

"It's Tramp barking!" Robin said softly. "It's our dog, Tramp, barking!"

"We're down here!" she called hoarsely. "Daddy! Kevin! Michael! Mr. Hunter! Tramp! We're down here in this hole!"

Her father's face, along with Mr. Hunter's, appeared at the top of the opening.

"Thank God!" they said in unison. "Thank God!"



"Amy!" Robin begged. "Where is she?"

"Safe, Robin, safe at the ranch. She was a little heroine."

"It was all my fault," Robin groaned. "I was to blame!"

"Just don't think about that now," Mr. Hunter said compassionately. "We'll leave all explanations until later. We'll get you girls out of there first. We have ropes."

"Take Robin first, Daddy," Mindy said. "She hurt her ankle."

"It's nothing," Robin said quickly. "Nothing matters now that we know Sugar is safe. Nothing matters but that."

"Michael and Kevin are tying some loops in the ropes," Robin's father said. "We'll let them down. Can you tie them under your arms?"

"Of course!"

"I'll help her," Mindy said. "I thought we'd never see anyone again. We called and called and called."

"I know," Mr. Hunter said in a quiet, strained voice. "We'll have you both safe and warm and cozy at Rancho Lucia soon. Here come the ropes, Robin."

His face disappeared from the hole above, and Robin could see the outline of the boys' heads as they leaned to lower the ropes.

She fastened them securely under her arms, then

slowly, slowly, as she pushed with her elbows to keep her body from striking the hard sides of the hole, the boys drew her up and into her father's arms.

Down went the ropes again for Mindy, who held the rubbery bundle close to her body.

"What the heck is that?" Kevin asked her.

"Diving suits Frank and Art used," Robin answered. "We found them hidden down there. Oh, it's such a long story," she added wearily. "Is Amy really safe, Dad?"

"She is. Believe me."

"I do. What time is it?"

"After seven o'clock. The boys had just returned from taking Rip to the airport, when Amy rode in on Nugget and told her story."

"On Nugget? Nugget is right here, Daddy. *Is Amy all right?*"

"She is, Robin. Nugget wouldn't be left behind when we came to look for you. Michael led him."

"Dear Nugget!" Robin murmured as Michael helped her into the saddle. "Where are Sunshine and Bueno?"

"The whole story will have to wait till we get home," Mr. Kane answered.

"I think we can guess," Mindy said, "can't we, Robin?"

Robin nodded her head and bent over to bury her face in Nugget's mane.

"We found the suits," she said huskily. "That means Frank and Art were in these woods. That's why Amy screamed. They stole the horses. Oh, Mr. Hunter!"

"They have a lot to answer for," Mindy's father said between tight lips. "Now we must get these girls home."

"Don't forget we told Mom and Manuela and the rest of the people at the ranch that Michael would fire his rifle three times if we found Robin and Mindy safe. Fire, Michael!" Kevin said.

Michael loosed his rifle from his saddle, aimed into the air, and fired.

A bevy of startled birds rose, fluttered their wings, and settled again.

Slowly the cavalcade started back down the trail to Rancho Lucia. Michael led Nugget, for Robin's swollen foot would not fit into the stirrup.

Mindy rode in front of her father, who held one arm close around her, the other holding the reins.

"Are you comfortable?" Michael looked back to ask Robin.

"I'll never complain about anything again as long as I live," she answered.

"Put it in writing!" Kevin shouted.

Everyone laughed.

It was good to laugh again.

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## *The Mystery Unfolds*

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# *11*

IT SEEMED as though everybody connected with Rancho Lucia—family, vaqueros, dogs, even Felipe's spotted cat and her new kittens—was at the gate as the horses entered.

Michael helped Robin from Nugget's back. The gentle horse nuzzled her brown curls lovingly.

Amy ran out to meet her sister, and Robin held her close, her eyes swimming.

"You were lost," the little girl said. "I was alone. I was scared. I called and called you and Mindy, and you didn't come."

"I know," Robin said huskily. "It's all over now."

"Not quite," Michael said, tight-lipped.

Kevin nodded, his face grim. "Frank and Art will pay for this."

In the big living room of the ranch, which never

had looked so cozy and friendly and inviting, Manuela, long a volunteer nurse, quickly removed the emergency bandage.

With a nod of approval to Mindy for the way it had been rolled, she brought a pail of hot water in which an old family remedy, epsom salts, had been dissolved.

"You soak your ankle in this a long time," Manuela said.

"You eat something now?" Mamacita asked, hovering over both girls.

"We'll bring trays in here, Mamacita. Is that all right?" Mrs. Kane asked.

"All right," Mamacita said happily. "José, you help me maybe?"

Rested, fed, and with her ankle resting comfortably in the hot water, Robin asked, her round blue eyes anxious, "What did happen, Sugar?"

Mindy, on the sofa, with her father's arm around her, echoed, "Yes, Amy, what happened?"

"I was hunting rocks," the little girl said. "I found an agate one. I brought it home, didn't I, Kevin?"

"You did, and it's a beauty, Sugar. Tell the girls what happened right after you found it."

"I heard steps. I thought you had come back." Amy shuddered. "It wasn't you. It was those bad boys Frank and Art."

"I knew it!" Robin cried. "Oh, Amy!"

"They said they wanted to ride the horses. They said they had to get away. I told them no—bad people stole horses. They laughed. That big one, Frank, went over to Nugget and—Robin, I *knew* he couldn't steal Nugget. I knew you'd just die if he stole Nugget."

"You didn't try to do anything to prevent him, did you, Sugar? Oh, Sugar, honey. . . ."

"I did, Robin! I picked up Nugget's rein, but that boy grabbed it out of my hand. He pushed me away. . . ."

Michael and Kevin jumped to their feet and started pacing. Robin turned white.

"Did he hurt you?" Robin asked through tight lips.

"No!" Amy chuckled. "*I hurt him!* At least, Nugget and I both hurt him. When he pushed me away, Nugget reared up. That boy tried to get on his back, and Nugget wouldn't let him! He kept backing and backing. This made Frank mad, so he kicked him."

"Oh, no!" Robin cried. "Poor Nugget! Was he hurt?"

"Not too bad. You didn't even notice it, did you, when you were riding him back here? He didn't even limp, did he?"

"Not Nugget! He's such . . . such a gentleman, he'd never let me know. I could fight that Frank myself for kicking a darling horse like Nugget!"

"Just wait till I tell you what Nugget did to him!" Amy said gleefully. "He gave him such a mighty kick with his hind foot that Frank yelled and went around howling. I guess Nugget hit a funny bone. Frank could hardly walk, either, Robin. When he tried to get on Sunshine, Art had to boost him. Art rode Bueno. They both went away.

"After they left, I called and called," Amy went on. "I thought you were lost."

"We were—down in that cave. We called you, too, Sugar. You couldn't hear us." Robin shivered, reliving her desperation.

"I thought I heard you once," Amy continued. "Then I thought I heard you scream. . . ."

"That was when we fell," Mindy moaned.

"I *had* to go for help," Amy said proudly, "and I did, just like the Hunter-Kane detectives do—"

"Exactly!" Robin said.

"Only when I got here, they wouldn't let me go back with them to find you. They *had* to take Nugget, because he just went. They took Tramp instead of me, and I was the only one who knew where we had our picnic. Tramp didn't."

Mr. Kane tousled Amy's golden hair. "Tramp has a hunting dog's nose. He took us right to the place where you fell, Robin."

"Now you see why we have to find Frank and Art," Robin said determinedly. "For scaring poor Amy."

For kicking Nugget. For stealing Sunshine and Bueno. *And they did plant that fake animal in the water.*"

"My vaqueros, they'll want to hunt for those horse thieves," José said. "That Frank and Art pretty dumb if they don't know what happens to horse stealers in cow country."

"That's why, when we called him, Sheriff Jackson ordered our vaqueros to stay out of this," Mr. Hunter said.

"They just go free?" José muttered.

"Not free. There are things to be settled with them," Michael said in a low voice to Kevin.

Manuela poured more water into the bucket, and Robin begged, "Can't you possibly bandage it now? I feel so helpless sitting here with my foot in this pail."

"What else would you be doing?" her father asked. "It's black dark outside. Sheriff Jackson has grounded all of us, to give his men a chance to hunt for Frank and Art and the horses when daylight comes."

Mr. Hunter added, "He said that if we fill the woods full of amateur deputies cracking through the underbrush, we've seen the last of Sunshine and Bueno *and* Frank and Art."

"Sheriff Jackson's men don't know the places to look," Robin said worriedly. "In the hours between



now and daylight, they could easily escape. Manuela, *please* bind my ankle."

Robin's mother sat up straight in her chair.

"Robin Kane, if you have any idea. . . ."

"Of going after them myself?" Robin asked. "I haven't. How can I even think, though, with my foot in a bucket of water? Manuela, please! It doesn't hurt now, and it isn't swollen nearly so much."

"All right, Robin," Manuela said. "A little more soaking, and it wouldn't hurt at all. But all right! If you say so, I'll bandage it."

"I *am* grateful to you," Robin said and smiled at the tall gracious woman, who knelt to bind her hurt ankle. "You're a wonderful nurse."

"She's head of the Pink Ladies. You forgot that, didn't you, Robin?" Mindy said proudly.

"No, I didn't," Robin said as the bandage went tighter and tighter. "But Manuela has always bound up our banged arms and legs and heads."

"Because I love every one of you," Manuela said as she deftly fastened the top of the bandage and helped Robin to her feet.

"That goes both ways," Michael said, smiling. He took Robin's other arm and helped her to stand, take a few steps, and walk across the room, limping only slightly.

"Don't be too quick to jump and run with that ankle, *amigacita!*" Manuela warned.

"I'll try not to," Robin promised. "I'm sure lucky that it wasn't broken. I have things to do. Mindy and I both have millions of things to do."

"Give Sheriff Jackson a chance at some of them!" Mr. Hunter warned. "Three young girls in danger in one day is enough for any parents."

"And brothers," Michael said.

"*We* have two sound legs apiece," Kevin muttered.

"And sense enough to keep out of this till daylight," his father added. "I hope!"

"Everybody not smiling. Everybody look so sad. Everybody should clap hands, because Robin and Mindy safe and little sister, *Tecolotita*, home in the nest," Mamacita said. "Everybody dance—like this!"

She hummed a gay Spanish tune and lifted her flowered skirt above still-nimble ankles to dance around the room.

José clapped out the tempo as fat, incredibly graceful Mamacita dipped and waved her hands, faster and faster, till, to applauding hands around the room, she sank into a chair.

"Young people too long-faced," she said. "Have fun, eh, Ramon?" she asked the green parrot in his cage in the corner.

In a clear high voice she sang:

*"Canta y nollores porque cantando.  
Se alegran los corazones."*

Mindy translated for the benefit of Robin and several of the others. "It means

" 'Sing and do not weep.  
Singing makes the heart glad.' "

"I bring my guitar for Kevin," old José said and disappeared into the room beyond the kitchen.

"There's one thing sure," Robin said to the group around her. "*I* can't dance, no matter what Mamacita says. I *can* walk, though, and tomorrow I *can* help hunt for that thing Mr. Smith saw in the cove.

"With all the other things that happened today, Mindy and I forgot to tell you that we're *sure* we saw something in the water off Wolf Point. It was through the binoculars, and it was so very, very far away. I'm sure in my bones, though, that it's right there that we will find that animal! Won't that be the day?"

Her voice grew serious as she added, "There's so much that we have to do first."

"You're right," Mindy agreed. "Everybody seems to forget that I love Sunshine as much as Robin loves Nugget, and he and that little pony, Bueno, are in the hands of those brutes!"

"That's what I mean," Robin said soberly. "There's not much reason to dance and sing, Mamacita. I'm sorry. It's been a million years since this morning. We've had such a day."

"*Tecolotita*," Mamacita said to Amy, "little owl,

*your* face isn't long and sad. . . ."

"I'm so glad to be home with everybody," Amy said. "I feel like singing. Mamacita, I know— I'll tell a story. Kevin, you play chords slowly and softly while I tell it—like this." She hummed. "It's a story José told me. He said it was true."

"Like the story of the bear the man hugged to death?" Robin asked, teasing.

"All my stories true," José said, laughing. "You tell this one . . . goes with music—" He sang under his breath.

"I know that one!" Kevin said. "It's an old song. Go on, Amy; I'll keep up with you."

"It's a story about a hen and her chickens," Amy began.

"No bad guy in it?" Michael asked as Kevin's fingers caught the beat.

Amy nodded. "*Mal Hombre*, he's in it. 'Bad man' that means, doesn't it, José?"

José nodded. "Better get going, *amigacita*, before Kevin gets ahead of you."

"The story is about ghosts," Amy began mysteriously, "*La Gallina*, the mother hen, and her little chickens, *gallinitos*. The Yanax Indians who lived in this country before there ever was a Rancho Lucia used to call the top of the hill, where we were today, 'Devil's Elbow.' It was haunted. Fog ghosts hid there. People used to see them."

"Oh, come on, Sugar!" Michael teased.

"Uh-huh, they did!" Amy insisted. "People were scared when they saw them . . . ghosts of people . . . the ghost of *Mal Hombre*, the bad man who tried to kill the Padre from the Mission, and the ghosts of *La Gallina* and the *gallinitos*.

"Well, one dark night," Amy said dramatically, "the Padre started out with a hen and chickens in a bag. He was going to take them to a poor man who had no chickens. When he got to the top of the ridge, to Devil's Elbow, he saw *Mal Hombre* following him.

"The Padre was very strong, but *Mal Hombre* hit him over the head with a heavy club—"

"Bong!" said Kevin and twanged the strings.

Everybody jumped, and Amy giggled.

"He stole the bag of chickens and ran away," the little girl continued. "When *Mal Hombre* got home, there were no chickens in the bag! He was very angry and hurried back to the place where he had beaten the Padre and stolen the chickens. Do you know what he found there?"

"No!" Kevin said and twanged again.

"He found *La Gallina* and her *gallinitos* scratching on the ground. The Padre had disappeared.

"Mal Hombre put the chickens in his bag again, and when he got home, they were gone! This made him very, very angry, and he went back again and

found the hen and chickens scratching. This time he found something else."

"What?" Kevin asked and hit the guitar strings.

"He found the Padre sitting on the ground, not hurt, watching *La Gallina* and her chickens.

"This time, when *Mal Hombre* lifted his stick, *La Gallina* and her chickens flew at him, scratched his eyes out, and disappeared in a mist of fog."

"It could happen, Sugar," Kevin said. He struck a few chords, and he, Manuela, Amy, Mamacita, and José sang:

*"La Gallina* hold your head up,  
Through the fog call to your chicks,  
Man *Mal Hombre*, he come get you,  
Catch you with his bag of tricks.

*"La Gallina, gallinitos,*  
Hurry, hurry, hurry fast!  
*Gallinitos, stay with mama,*  
Till *Mal Hombre*, he go past!"

"I think that was a wonderful story, Sugar," Robin said lovingly.

Amy hung her head, embarrassed.

"Kevin did it all with his music. How did you happen to know that song, Kevin?"

"I've been listening to José, too, Sugar. Where do you think I learned my excellent Spanish?"

Manuela raised an eyebrow.

"Terrible Spanish," Kevin amended.

"I wish you'd play some rock, Kevin, and watch Mamacita dance to it," Amy said.

"Another time," fat Mamacita said kindly. "Now we all say good night. Felipe is long ago fast asleep. Rancho Lucia sleep, eh, Mr. Hunter?"

Robin always loved the music, the dancing, the spicy smell of Mamacita's food, the shaded lights, Tramp and Perro snoozing, the little kittens tumbling across the floor, the sound of cattle lowing in the distance, the occasional soft nicker of a horse in the corral.

Tonight, however, even as everybody sang and Mamacita danced, under it all Robin had felt anxiety, a sense of something that remained unfinished, of something frightening.

"I have a feeling I can't shake off," she told Mindy as they went back along the wide hall to their bedroom. "It's a feeling that—well, that no matter if this has been a terrific day, it isn't quite over yet."

Mindy yawned sleepily. "Maybe not for you. You're a one-man Scotland Yard. As for me, if anything else happens today, *don't call me!*"

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## *Moonlight Chase*

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# 12

IN THE ROOM where Mindy and Robin were to sleep, a heavy, carved walnut bed dominated all the space.

The rest of the furniture was in proportion: huge and magnificent, but a little overpowering for two young girls.

"It was Manuela's father's and mother's room," Mindy said.

"Were they giants?" Robin asked. "The bed must be nearly four feet from the floor. Do we take a running jump for it?"

"No, silly. We use that little ladder over in the corner. You can feel pretty important, too, to be allowed to sleep in this room. Pretty important people have slept here."

"Gosh!" Robin said. "How did I happen to draw a special room?"



"For one reason: Manuela likes you very much. She thinks, and my daddy thinks, too, that Michael and I are a lot happier since we've known the Kane family. Boy, is she right!"

"That goes double, remember," Robin answered. "I think another reason she's letting me sleep here is that it's on the side of the house where the corral and the pasture are."

"Maybe so. She knows how crazy you are about Nugget, and even if you can't see him when it's dark, you like to be as near to him as possible . . . maybe hear him snuffle, when everything else is quiet but the owls."

"Wouldn't you be crazy about a horse that's almost human, the way Nugget is? Wasn't he brave the way he fought off Frank and saved Amy?"

"Yes. He walked along so gently, too, when he was bringing you home with your hurt ankle. Does it feel better now?"

"Almost as good as new. Mindy, it's bright moonlight outside. I can see almost as far as I can when it's daytime. I can see the horses in the pasture. I can even see the trees where the trail starts through the woods."

Mindy found the small stepladder and put it at the side of the great canopied bed. "Pull the curtains then, Robin, if the moonlight's so bright. I can't sleep with light in my eyes, though tonight I'm so tired, I

think I could sleep through another earthquake."

She yawned and crawled into the softness of the huge bed. "You can take the other side, next to the window, if you can stay awake long enough to carry the stepstool over to that side. Good night, Robin."

Robin *was* tired. She was yawning drowsily, still she couldn't sleep. She had told the truth when she said her ankle was much better, but there was enough of a dull ache to keep her from drifting off to sleep immediately.

Everybody else must have gone right to sleep, because there was stillness everywhere, except for the beloved night noises. *Next to the slapping of the waves against the rocks at home, I love the night noises here on the ranch*, Robin thought.

She wriggled, trying to get more comfortable. *Everything seems to be so big tonight . . . this bed . . . that great wide sweep of water near Wolf Point. We have to go there the very first thing after Frank and Art are found tomorrow!*

Finally Robin slipped down the ladder and went to the window. A full moon shone. She could see for miles around. As she watched, a thin cloud crept over the moon, sending long, scary shadows to the pasture where the horses huddled.

Shadows?

Moving shadows, they were, which stayed even when the moon came out from behind the cloud

and shone full again—shadows which moved silently, except for a faint *clop clop* as two dusky riders hurried to the cover of the thicket at the beginning of the trail.

Robin looked hard, to be sure she had seen what she thought she had seen. She followed the shadows as they moved out of sight up the trail. Frank and Art? She shook Mindy.

"Are you awake?" she whispered, poking the sleeping girl gently.

"Who? What?" Mindy cried, startled. "Oh, Robin, I must have been talking in my sleep. Haven't you gone to bed yet? What are you doing at the window?"

"Shhh!" Robin warned. "Somebody—two somebodies—just rode into the foothills. I saw them! Let's get out there fast and see if we can find who it was!"

"Not me!" Mindy said and hid her head under the covers. "It might be Frank and Art!"

"That's what I want to find out." Robin slipped her feet into sandals. "It's what I'm *going* to find out. Get into your clothes . . . hurry!"

"Oh, Robin," Mindy said, still half asleep. "I didn't hear a thing, and I don't think you did. I don't want to go outside, either. I want to stay in bed."

"Then stay there, scaredy! I'll go by myself."

"You can't do that. It's the way you always get me to do what you want to do . . . saying you'll go

alone. You know I *never* let you do anything by yourself, even if lots of times I wish I had, afterward."

Mindy was dressing while she talked, and, following closely after Robin, tiptoed down the long hall and out the side door.

Once out of hearing of the people in the house, Mindy said, "Let's call your father and mine, Robin. Let's at least call Michael and Kevin."

"Oh, Mindy, let's hurry and not call anybody else. By the time we'd get started with somebody else, Frank and Art would be so far away we'd never catch up with them. Get the saddles, please. I'll get Nugget and Sutter's Gold."

"Nugget is lame. He's as lame as you are."

"My ankle is almost well. Lame as Nugget may be, he'll never want to be left behind."

Mindy, almost as excited as Robin, now that she was fully awake, was soon back from the stable with the tack. Quickly the two girls saddled the sleepy horses and were off toward the trail leading over the foothills to Breakwater.

"They'll probably try to reach the coast without anyone seeing them," Robin said, "then let the horses find their way back home."

"What will we do if we catch up with them?" Mindy asked. "I think this is the most awful, the most dangerous, crazy thing, for us to go alone."

"I don't know what we'll do when we catch up

with them, Mindy, any more than you do, but we've always been able to meet a situation when we've had to."

"Maybe so. All the same, I don't think Daddy will ever forgive either of us for not at least letting Michael or Kevin know. Robin, Frank and Art just crossed that trail up there. Did you see them?"

"I did," Robin said, puzzled. "I don't know what to think, either. If they're going to Breakwater, they surely wouldn't turn off that trail. If they follow it, it leads right back to where we had our picnic today. What do you suppose they're doing that for?"

"Maybe they have a boat hidden down there on the shore below the cliff."

"They haven't. There wasn't a boat hidden there. But even if they did have a boat hidden, why would they come here to the ranch and run the risk of getting caught?"

"I don't know the answer," Mindy said. "I can see them now, though, in that open place on the trail—What's the matter, Robin?"

"Mindy," Robin said, her eyes wide, "those horses they're riding are not Sunshine and Bueno!"

"That's right. Wait a second, they're riding into the moonlight again."

"Jumping jeppers!" Robin said and let out a war whoop. "It's Michael and Kevin! Why didn't we think of that? Remember how mad they were about



Amy and the horse stealing. . . .”

“They even said Frank and Art had pushed us into that hole.”

“Yes, and those scuba suits Frank and Art hid. . . . Hey, Mindy, follow me!”

Robin touched Nugget’s side, and he responded immediately. Mindy followed close behind, on Sutter’s Gold.

The girls didn’t need to call to the boys. The moment their horses’ hooves quickened, the boys reined up and dismounted, coming back along the trail out of the shadows.

“Halt!” Kevin cried out, then slumped. “I might have known it. Old hawk-eyes-with-Indian-ears never sleeps. I told you, Michael! Didn’t I say it wouldn’t do one bit of good to try and get away from her?”

“What’s the difference?” Michael answered quietly. “I thought we should have told the girls, anyway. They’d have been plenty mad.”

“You’re right; we would have been,” Robin said, laughing with relief now that the two boys were with them. “We wouldn’t have been so angry at being left behind as at you for taking the wrong trail.”

“What do you mean, ‘the wrong trail’?” Kevin asked.

“This isn’t the way to Breakwater.” Robin wheeled Nugget around. “Follow me!”

“Follow you where?” Kevin asked. “Frank and

Art are hiding around that place they hid the suits, waiting for daylight.”

“Then what would they do?” Robin asked.

“Probably take the boat they have hidden at the foot of the cliff and get away.”

“There isn’t any boat there,” Robin said. “I looked up and down the shore when I had the binoculars yesterday. There isn’t any way to get down that cliff, either, except to fall down.”

“Maybe she’s right,” Michael said. “Maybe they *would* make for Breakwater port to try and get on some outbound fishing boat.”

“Follow me!” Robin sang out again and led off with Nugget. “We’re lucky the moon is so bright.”

Disgruntled but accepting Robin’s idea about Frank and Art as likely, Kevin turned his horse and followed, going west when they came to the Y in the trails.

For a while there was no sound except the soft beat of the horses’ hooves and the hooting of little tree owls calling to the moon.

“There are a million places they could hide out between here and Breakwater,” Kevin muttered. “How will we ever find them?”

“We haven’t seen Sunshine and Bueno making their way back to the ranch,” Michael said. “Which makes me think Frank and Art still have the horses and are staying someplace for the night, or—”



"Or they didn't come this way at all. You're too quick to agree with Robin," Kevin said. "I think we were on the right track, Mike, when we took that turn back there."

"Oh, Kevin, don't be so cross," Mindy said. She was able to smooth his feathers when nobody else could. "We're all after the same thing, and we've all surely had a hard day. I'm tired."

"Me, too," Robin said, "but when I think of poor Mr. Smith. . . ."

"And a couple of Dad's best horses stolen," Michael added.

"It's how they scared Amy that gets me the most," Kevin said bitterly. "Okay, Robin, we'll do it your way. What makes Sutter's Gold whinny?" he called back to Mindy.

"He didn't," she answered.

"Then what made Nugget whinny? Gosh, it couldn't have been Nugget. He'd have had to whinny in my ear, wouldn't you, boy?"

Kevin leaned over to pat the big golden horse. "Say, Robin, listen! *It could be Sunshine whinnying.* You listen, Mindy. You know best how he sounds. Hear that?"

"It is Sunshine!" Mindy cried. "He's tied somewhere near. Robin, isn't this right near where we hid in that cave to get away from El Gato?"

"The very place!"

Robin reined in Nugget and slid off his back. The others followed.

"I'll go ahead," Michael announced and pushed Robin back of him.

"I'm right with you," Kevin said. "I know where the place is. Careful, Mike. Quiet!"

"There's Sunshine!" Mindy whispered. "Bueno is right beside him. Michael, untie them, will you?"

"Shhh!" Michael warned. "*Frank and Art are in that cave!*"

He quietly untied the big palomino and the little quarter horse, slapped them lovingly, and pointed their noses toward the trail that led to Rancho Lucia. They needed no urging to be off.

"Go up to the mouth of the cave from this side," Robin whispered to the boys. "There's not too big an entrance, and don't stand in front of it. *Michael!*"

Michael whirled around.

"Watch out!" Robin called frantically. "Get away from that entrance! There's Frank's head sticking out! Now that they're cornered, they'll be desperate! Frank has a knife!"

"You're darned right I have," Frank snarled. "I'll use it, too. Stand away, Mike! You, too, Kevin!"

"Get back! Get under cover!" Michael called out of the corner of his mouth to Robin. "Where are you? Where did the girls go?"

"They followed the horses, if they were smart,"

Kevin whispered, "back to the ranch. They're not in sight. Mike, Frank means what he says. If we stop to find clubs for ourselves, they'll be gone!"

"You're so right, Kevin. Here we come!" Frank growled. "What's keepin' you?" he called back to Art. "Hurry! We ain't got a thing to be scared of."

Overhead Robin's voice rang out.

"Oh, you think you haven't? Heave ho, Mindy!"

A huge stone hurtled from above, hit the ground with a shuddering thud, rolled down the incline to the opening of the cave, and shut it off.

Frank howled like a wild animal. "What happened? You dumb ox, Art, if you'd been a second earlier. Who did that, anyway? Those crazy girls! Get goin', Art. Get back of my shoulder and push. I've got the knife handy. We'll get out of this!"

Frank grunted, then snarled at Art, "You're not pushin'. Push! Hard!"

They grunted, pushed, grunted, and groaned.

The big rock didn't move an inch. While it had been relatively easy to push it off the edge above and roll it down the slight incline into place, it was a different thing to push it up the incline and away from the opening.

With a shout of triumph, the girls ran down the hillock. "It was one chance in a hundred!" Robin cried. "We weren't sure it would work. Wasn't it neat? Right on target! It was Mindy's idea."

"I saw it in a movie about King Arthur," Mindy said. "When the enemy had the king's men crowded into the castle, some of them went up an inside stairway to the roof and rolled stones to keep the enemy out. I thought it would work just as well to close someone in!"

"And besides," Robin continued, raising her voice to be sure that Frank and Art could hear, "and besides, *you* used a boulder to close that cave we fell into where we found your diving suits. Maybe that's where Mindy got her idea."

Inside, Frank and Art, outwitted, shouted and growled their frustration.

"How do you like your cozy quarters?" Kevin called.

Frank snarled in answer.

"He sounds just like a grizzly, doesn't he?" Kevin said gleefully.

"They could hibernate in there all winter," Michael said.

Frank groaned. "Let us out of here! You've had your fun and gotten even," he whined. "You've got the horses back. No one's been hurt."

"Nobody but a schoolteacher who wanted to trust you. Nobody but a world-famous writer you ridiculed. Mr. Denny made reel after reel of pictures for his book," Robin said. "Pictures of that phony sea monster. He believed in it."

"I ain't goin' to cry any tears over Logan Denny," Frank said, "and neither should you. Who do you think planned the dummy? Me and Art ain't that smart."

"How contemptible can you get?" Robin shouted. "First you tried to make people think Mr. Smith himself had something to do with fooling people with that dummy."

"Nobody believed that!" Mindy said indignantly.

"And nobody will believe what you're saying about Logan Denny, either," Robin said. "Of all the mean things. . . ."

"Oh, yes, Miss Know-it-all," Frank sneered. "Don't believe what we tell you. Believe your eyes. Here, take a look at this paper I'm slippin' through."

Michael reached out, unfolded the paper, looked at it, raised his eyebrows, and handed it to Robin.

"It's a piece of Mr. Denny's own letter paper, Mindy," she said. "Let's see what it says on it."

The girls looked at the paper for a long time, showed it to Kevin, folded it, then handed it to Michael to put in his pocket.

"He was the brain behind that hoax," Robin said sadly. "The drawing he made on that piece of paper; that design for making the imitation plesiosaurus; the diagram for putting it in the water; even instructions for sinking it later! He wanted material for his book that desperately! Well, that will polish off Mr.

Logan Denny. Where did he go?" she called in to Frank.

"You guess, since you're so good at guessin'," he told her. "He probably went where we'd be now if somebody hadn't rushed us so—startin' all those church bells ringin' and the fire sirens goin', then settin' out in that Marine Laboratory boat!

"We were in the water tryin' to sink that phony sea monster so folks would think it just naturally disappeared. The boat with Mr. Smith in it was comin' so fast we couldn't even touch the dummy. It was all we could do to get out of our suits, roll 'em up, and hope they'd sink."

"No wonder Mr. Denny tried so hard to keep the laboratory boat from crossing the cove," Kevin said.

"Yeah," Frank said. "A lot he cared about our necks. All he wanted to do was to beat it, and he did. We outfoxed the whole bunch of them, though. We made it back to the beach, met the guys when they brought the dummy in, and grabbed our suits they'd found. They didn't even miss 'em, they were so steamed up about the dummy. We put up a pretty good show of bein' mad at whoever planted that thing, didn't we? Fooled everybody. Then Robin and Mindy had to fall right into that cave where we hid the suits. Talk about justice!"

"Yeah, let's talk about it," Kevin chuckled. "There both of you are, snug and warm. Go to sleep."

Get a good rest. We'll keep you company outside till Sheriff Jackson's men collect you."

The two boys inside kicked angrily at the stone, shouted in frustration, then were quiet.

"Mindy and I will ride back to Rancho Lucia now," Robin told Michael and Kevin. "We'll ask Mr. Hunter to call the sheriff from there. It won't be long till someone comes to relieve you. We'll go as fast as we can."

"Don't be in too much of a hurry, pardner," Kevin said, laughing and pulling an imaginary sombrero over his eyes as he and Michael settled down, backs against the rock, to wait. "It's kinda nice havin' a little conversation here in the bright moonlight with the *hombres* inside thar."

Robin laughed, swung herself onto Nugget's patient back, and turned him toward the ranch.

"It'll be a one-sided conversation, probably, Kevin," she called back to him. "Oh, dear, I hope the sheriff comes soon, because all four of us have to get to Pacific Point as soon as we possibly can in the morning. There *was* something moving in the water over there at Wolf Point. Mindy and I saw it—definitely—didn't we, Mindy?"

"I guess so," Mindy said and touched her pony's side to start him. "All I can think of right now is that great big, wonderful bed you dragged me out of, Robin. I'm so sleepy."

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## *Last Chance*

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# 13

IF THERE'S one thing sure in this world," Mr. Hunter said the next morning at breakfast, "it's this: Whenever the Hunter and Kane families get together, most anything can happen."

"Right!" Robin's father agreed. "Item one: We had a lot of fun last evening, after that hectic day. Mama-cita danced. Amy told a story. Kevin played his guitar—"

"I wish Rip could have been here," Mr. Hunter interrupted. "Of course, anytime he'd come he'd find Robin and Mindy in some kind of adventure. He told me you'd probably think he was showing off, because I ran that clip from his picture."

"Of course we didn't," Robin said quickly. "I wish he could have stayed longer. I thought that film was super—all those scary things swimming around."



"He surely is strong for the Hunter-Kane Detective Agency. He'll keep after me to put your activities on the screen."

"Plus Amy and Michael and Kevin," Robin added.

"And Tramp!" Amy shouted.

"And Tramp, for sure," Mindy echoed. "Maybe you think I wasn't glad to hear him bark when we were in that cavern. . . ."

"Don't forget Nugget," Robin insisted. "Gosh! What a big staff our detective agency actually has, Mindy."

"Item two," Robin's mother said seriously. "I had enough worry yesterday afternoon, with three girls in peril. Then I saw them safely at home and Robin's leg better, saw them all go to bed, fell asleep myself—"

"And *bingo!*" Mr. Kane took up the story. "The clock hadn't struck midnight before the whole outfit was in action again. First Sunshine and Bueno clattered in riderless—"

"Which we had expected to happen," Mr. Hunter reminded him, "if Frank and Art had reached Breakwater and found refuge on a fishing boat."

"What *I* didn't expect," Mrs. Kane said unhappily, "was to see two girls, Robin and Mindy, riding in from the hills not far behind those two stolen horses."

"Oh, Mom," Robin said, "you *know* I had to go and find out who those two riders were that I saw

making for the hills. I thought they were Frank and Art."

"All the more reason for you to have told your father or Mr. Hunter."

"Gosh, Mom," Kevin broke in, "you said all that last night."

"I guess I did," Mrs. Kane said. "I guess when you have a detective in the family. . . ."

"I think being a detective is the most fun in the whole world," Amy sang out. "I'm going to be one, too."

"Oh, no!" her mother cried. "Not another!"

"Be thankful for present blessings, Mom," Kevin said, laughing. "Frank and Art are safely tucked away in the juvenile detention home."

"And glad enough to be there," Mr. Hunter chuckled. "You and Michael must have told them some pretty lurid stories of what might happen to them if the vaqueros in San Antonio River Valley caught up with them."

Michael looked across the table at Kevin and winked. "We did. Gosh, Robin and Mindy couldn't have done a better job of sealing that pair in the cave if they'd taken measurements. I have to hand it to you," he told the girls.

"It was nine-tenths luck," Robin said. "We could have missed. Don't think I don't appreciate something you and Michael did," Robin said gratefully.

"Neither one of you ever said one word about how dumb I was to trust that Logan Denny. Wasn't it awful what he did?"

"You weren't the only one who fell for his line," Kevin said, "if that's any consolation. Half the village of Pacific Point did. Think of all the newspapers and magazines he's fooled, too. It's lucky for him he's disappeared."

"He was clever enough not to have actually committed any crime a person could name," Robin's father said. "He couldn't be arrested for helping to fake that plesiosaurus."

"Maybe not," Robin admitted, "but if there's any justice, he'll be a long time finding a publisher for any future stories he writes."

"Yeah," Kevin said. "He made a lot of enemies. He fooled the editor of the Pacific Point paper, and I'd hate to get *him* down on me. He'll broadcast Mr. Logan Denny's pedigree, you can count on that."

"If he can't be arrested for anything," Amy asked, "how could Sheriff Jackson arrest Frank and Art?"

"Because they stole horses, Sugar," Mr. Hunter answered, "and there's hardly a worse crime in this valley than that. If they hadn't been so stupid as to go off with Sunshine and Bueno, they wouldn't be in custody now."

"No matter what other terrible thing they did?" Amy gasped.

"I don't think so, Sugar. Some things are criminal, and people can be punished for them. Some things are just stupid and cruel and—"

"It was a stupid, cruel thing they did to Mr. Smith," Robin said. "Frank and Art as good as said Mr. Smith was the one who faked that plesiosaurus. Here we sit, too, yakety-yakking when we should be over there at Wolf Point. We did see something over there, Mindy and I, even if it was so far away. Daddy, can we possibly leave now?"

"There are some things Manuela, your mother, Mr. Hunter, and I have to do," Mr. Kane said.

"Oh, let the kids take my car," Mr. Hunter broke in. "That is, if you and Mrs. Kane will have room in your car for Manuela and me when we get ready to leave."

"Oh, Mr. Hunter, thanks!" Robin's blue eyes beamed.

"Where's the bundle of scuba suits?" Mindy asked, bounding out of her chair. "We'll need them for evidence."

"And the chart drawn on Mr. Denny's letterhead," Robin added.

"We can drop them both off at the newspaper office and tell the editor our story, then go on to Wolf Point," Michael said, ticking off errands on his fingers. "Is everybody ready to go? I have the key to the car, Dad, and thanks."

Another frustrating disappointment waited for them at the newspaper office. The editor was elated over the story Robin told him, but he shook his head when she added, "I guess this will solve some of Mr. Smith's worries, won't it, now that it can be established that Frank and Art and Mr. Denny made that dummy?"

"You'd think so, Robin, but— Well, I talked with Mr. Smith yesterday. He's determined to resign from his teaching position. He is sure this is the only thing that will return the village to sanity. He wants to get out of the picture altogether."

"Oh, no!" they all protested. Robin went on, "He can't! Not when Frank and Art have confessed, and we have Mr. Denny's diagram!"

"I imagine he will still think that the business of the sea monster will quiet down more quickly if he leaves," the editor insisted. "He has a letter all ready to present to the school board at their meeting tonight. I don't think he will change his mind."

"I *knew* we should have been on the job every minute," Robin wailed. "There's only one thing we have to do now—find that thing, whatever it is, and *find it today!*"

"You may as well give up on that, Robin," the editor said with finality. "If Mr. Smith saw anything strange, unusual, unknown, heaven knows there have been enough scientific groups watching for it, and

they haven't found a thing. How do you think you can find it, and before he presents that letter. . . ."

"I don't *think* we can find it," Robin said in a clear, strong voice. "I *know* we can.

"We didn't have time to tell you all the story of what happened to Mindy and me just before we fell in that cave where we found the suits. *We saw something moving in the water near Wolf Point!*"

"Not really!" the editor said and struck his forehead in mock amazement. "Run up the flag!"

"You may doubt it if you want to," Robin said resolutely, "but you just wait. You'll change your mind."

They hurried out of the newspaper office.

"Let's not even take time to go home," Robin said.

"Let's go up there to the top of the cliff."

"And jump off and grab the thing around its neck if you see it?" Kevin said.

"Oh, dear, you're right," Robin admitted. "We do have to go and get the camera, don't we?"

"Robin, please," Michael said. "This time let's go after it a little more scientifically."

"Like what, Michael?"

"Let's go to our house and get one of my dad's movie cameras, one that's equipped for distance, with twice as strong a lens as yours, and—"

"That will take ages!" Robin said impatiently.

"It'll be worth it," Kevin said. "We'll have to tow

our raft down to the spot across from the Point, too."

Robin's mouth fell open. "A raft? What for?"

"Because that man whose book we read in the library said a simple raft, drifting with the current, is the best way to investigate unknown life in the sea. He said it beats a submarine or bathyscaphe . . . all that expensive stuff."

"We don't *have* a week's time to make a raft," Robin said despairingly. "Mr. Smith will have resigned and gone by that time."

"We *have* a raft," Michael said quietly. "Kevin and I made it weeks ago. It's tied up at the dock in back of our house. It won't take long to hook it up to the powerboat."

Robin's face brightened. "You *do* have a raft? Jeepers, I'm the world's worst know-it-all, aren't I? A raft . . . and a real movie camera!"

She was quite subdued, for Robin, as the car whizzed around to the Hunter home.

"I'll meet you out in back at the dock," Michael called as he ran into the house to get the camera.

Kevin coupled the raft to the rear of the motorboat, and soon they were all cutting through the water to the beach below the cliff.

As they drew near, they could see a figure on the shore calling to them.

"It's old Mr. Harvey," Michael said, "hunting shells."

"I wish he'd hunt someplace else today," Robin said as the boat slid to shore and Michael tied it to a cypress stump. "He's shouting at us. What's he saying?"

"He thinks this is his private beach," Kevin said, smiling. "He's about as kooky as you are, Robin. You think it's your private lookout. I can't hear what he's saying."

When the young people jumped to shore, the old man ran up to them and pointed out to the dark water. "There's another dummy over there, Robin. I wish you and everybody else would stop filling the water around here with dummy sea monsters."

Robin bristled.

"Pay no attention to him," Michael said. "He's imagining things."

"There's nothing over there," he told the old man kindly. "What did you think you saw, Mr. Harvey?"

"Same thing as was in the water the other day when everybody came swarming around here. You'd think one was enough."

"The two boys who planted that fake sea monster in the water the other day are not around now," Michael said and put his arm across the old man's shoulders. "That's all over. We're looking for the *real* thing Mr. Smith saw now."

"'Tain't over, no such thing," the old man said. "I saw it. I did!"



"Maybe he saw a decoy," Kevin said, laughing.

"Wait!" Robin said. "Mr. Harvey, did you really see something strange over there? He *may* have," she told Mindy. "We were sure we did yesterday. When did you see it, Mr. Harvey?"

"Less'n an hour ago," he said. "It was as near alive as anything I ever saw, too, and I wasn't seein' things."

He stalked off up the shore angrily. "It's probably sunk now," he called back to them. "Just a bunch of rags soaked up and sunk. I wish people would let this place alone, and that goes for you kids, too. Nobody never saw no real monster around here."

"I'm . . . not . . . so . . . sure!" Robin said, her eyes wide with wonder. Then she added dejectedly, "If he's right, *and he just may be right*, then we've missed it again."

"I think he was seeing things. I think you're hunting for a snark, Robin—something that never was. I think I'm fed up with the whole business. Mike, let's go up the gully and hunt for rocks." Kevin kicked the sand. "I never did really believe Mr. Smith saw anything but a piece of seaweed."

"He *thought* he saw something real," Michael said slowly. "Maybe he did. I'll stick with Robin, Kev. I think you should, too."

Kevin stood for a moment, then went on up the gully.

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## *The Fantastic Film*

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# 14

ROBIN HARDLY had time to comment on Kevin's departure, when he was back again—rushing, tumbling down the ravine.

"Bring the binoculars!" he cried. "Follow me! Hurry!"

Robin, Michael, and Mindy scurried up the gully to the top of the cliff.

Kevin handed his sister the binoculars, and she put them to her eyes, sweeping around Wolf Point, gazing fixedly.

Finally, without a word, she handed the glasses back to Kevin and sat down on a rock.

"What's the matter?" Kevin asked anxiously. "Don't you feel well?"

"That was a pretty contemptible trick is all I have to say," Robin muttered. "There wasn't a thing in

that water, and you know it."

"You're wrong. You couldn't be more wrong," Kevin answered and told Michael to take a look.

"Maybe I'm a goon for looking," Michael said, "but here goes!"

Robin watched him swing the glasses high, then low and across the cove, then put them down, awed. "Gol! Try again, Robin. It's there, sure as the Lord made little green apples. Take another look!"

"*I can see it without binoculars!*" Robin shouted, not believing her eyes. "Kevin, I'm sorry. Mindy . . . see . . . way out there, barely in sight, in the water at the turn of the cove. Do you see anything?"

Mindy shaded her eyes, called out excitedly, "It's a neck! It's a head! Robin, start shooting with the camera!"

"The old guy was right!" Kevin said, his voice low with wonder. "What do you know? *The old guy was right!* Keep shooting, Robin!"

"I *have* been shooting! Oh, golly! It *is* the thing Mr. Smith saw! There's not too much to be seen way up here so high. Let's go down to the raft!"

Down they sped to the beach and onto the raft.

Quickly, silently, the boys paddled it across the dark water of the cove.

The motion picture camera whined and recorded.

Still Robin was not satisfied. It was so dark! So far away!



It was even darker as the raft drifted behind the rocks at the cove entrance, but Robin could see what was most certainly the foreshortened shadow of a huge body. She held the camera high, directing it toward the thing's shadowy shape.

"I wish there were some sunlight!" she whispered desperately. "If that thing would only come out where it's light!"

For a second a shaft of light glanced from the shining rocks above Wolf Point, down across the path of Robin's camera.

"I think I may have a picture!" she whispered prayerfully, "but it's still so far away. Make the raft go faster, Michael!"

"Keep your finger on the button!" Michael panted, pulling hard on the oar.

*"I am! I will! I am! I am!"* Robin gasped. *"Oh, it's going toward the deep water . . . hurry, Michael, hurry!"*

"What if it turns and attacks us?" Mindy cried, white-faced. "That's what happened to old-time sailing ships."

"What do we care if it does?" Robin whispered gleefully. "Don't you realize what it is we're seeing? What we're proving for Mr. Smith?"

"What good will it do us if . . . we're eaten up . . . or the . . . raft . . . sinks?" Mindy sobbed.

"We aren't in the slightest danger," Michael

assured his sister. "Robin, I don't think you're shooting a thing but water now."

"I know," she answered and laid the camera on the floor of the raft.

"I saw it disappear exactly as Mr. Smith saw it—right down into the deep water. It didn't dive. Oh, golly!"

"Gosh!" Mindy sighed.

The boys rested their oars a minute and let the raft drift.

"Now comes the exciting part!" Robin said, her eyes shining. "Remember what Mr. Smith told everybody who was watching for it the other day?"

"He said that if we ever get a picture of anything that even remotely resembles the thing he described, we should seal the camera immediately, preferably in the presence of witnesses," Mindy recalled.

"Here are the witnesses!" Kevin shouted. "Four of us!"

"I have some tape in the first-aid kit on the boat," Michael added. "We can seal it there. Step on it, Kevin!"

In no time at all they had reached the shore, had coupled the raft, and were racing through the water in the powerboat.

At home they transferred to Michael's car and sped to Monteleone College and Professor Edwards.

Fortunately they found him in his laboratory.

They quickly explained the emergency: Mr. Smith's determination to resign. Then, laughing, talking all at once, they tried to tell him of their sighting and the pictures.

"If only there could have been enough light for clear pictures!" Professor Edwards said fervently. "We'll go into the darkroom and see."

There they waited breathlessly.

Gradually, as the tiny frames emerged from the solution and were held to the light, they revealed, faintly but unmistakably, the dusky form of the animal they had so earnestly sought!

Now for the meeting tonight.

"I think my dad may be at your house," Michael told Robin and Kevin. "Let's go there first."

Robin nodded, a big smile crossing her face. "If I don't get to tell Mom and Dad and your dad soon, I'm going to bust up into splinters. They'll *never* believe us!"

"Not till they have a chance to see the evidence, they won't!" Mindy cried.

Thrilled, almost hysterical, nearly impossible to understand because they all talked at once, they told of their search and what they had found.

"And then it sank," Robin ended the story. "Just like that!" She snapped her fingers. "Oh, wait till you see what we have on this film!" She patted the

bundle under her arm. "How will we ever get it across to the board?"

"And Mr. Smith," Kevin added.

"I think I may know a way," Mr. Hunter said.

First he dialed the president of the school board and asked him if he could come to his home before the board meeting . . . half an hour earlier. "There is something very important we must show you," he explained. The president accepted readily.

It was the same with the other members of the board.

"They're so curious!" Mr. Hunter chuckled. "Watch them show up early!"

It wasn't so easy when Mr. Hunter called Mr. Smith to invite him. The teacher explained quietly that he had not planned to attend the board meeting at all—that he had sent a letter to be read by the president.

"My daddy is a good persuader," Mindy whispered to Robin. "Everything has gone all right so far. Shut your eyes and listen!"

Robin listened, frowned, then laughed out loud as Mr. Hunter's conversation proceeded.

"This is something so many of your students want to show you and say to you. I think you owe it to them. Don't disappoint them. They've been pretty loyal. . . . Good! You will be with us? Good!"

Lastly, Mr. Hunter called the newspaper editor.



A puzzled, pale, nervous Mr. Smith was shown into the semidarkened projection room. Bewildered, he looked around, saw some of the board members, hesitated.

"It's all right!" Robin called out, exultant.

Mr. Smith put his hand to his mouth, stifling a groan.

"Oh, Robin, are you here?"

"Just wait! Sit here!" Mindy directed him to a seat. "You'll change your opinion about Robin."

Dubious, Mr. Smith sat down.

The lights went out and the screen grew luminous. An expanse of water appeared, gently rolling.

Mr. Smith sat up straight in his seat.

Way off, in the quiet cove beneath Wolf Point, a dark shape appeared, silhouetted against the white sand of the shelf. It was almost indistinguishable at so great a distance.

"Is this all?" Mr. Smith asked, disappointment choking his voice.

"Wait till you see what comes next!" Robin sang out triumphantly. "After we saw it way over there, we got on the raft and drifted closer and closer and closer, till, jeepers! See what we got!"

"We were too scared and excited to move," Mindy called out. "Robin kept on shooting!"

On the screen the picture rocked, tumbled, and went off.

"That's where I got so excited I almost went over the side," Robin explained, her voice high and tense. "Here it is again! If *only* there had been more light!"

A dark brown shape showed on the screen, lying not more than a few feet below the surface and not more than a few hundred feet from the raft.

"I held the camera high in the air," Robin explained. "I turned it right down on that shape in the water. Glory! Just look!"

A shadowy neck then emerged from the water, topped by a dim head not unlike that of a deer. Back of the neck and head, in the water, two paddles showed faintly on the shadowed body.

Slowly, as they watched, the animal quivered, faded, disappeared into the depths of the dark water.

Then the screen showed clear again.

"There you have it," Professor Edwards said solemnly. "We don't know what it is, but we *do* know Mr. Smith saw this creature. We believe it may be landlocked in that cove and will be seen again.

"What national and international scientists will make of it is a matter for conjecture. *I* think, and I am sure Mr. Smith thinks, too, that what you have just seen dimly on the screen may be some kind of a plesiosaurus, long thought extinct.

"We may or may not be right.

"It may be that the animal will have to be seen and photographed again and again—or even finally

brought up by some giant net—before it is fully believed. Scientists are skeptical, some of them, and rightfully so. One thing seems pretty sure to me: From now on Pacific Point will be a visiting place for reputable men of science. People of this village will hold their heads high. This should be especially true of our science teacher at Cypress Junior-Senior High School. Cheers for him!”

Shy, modest Mr. Smith stood, a broad smile breaking across his face as the people in the projection room saluted him.

“I am so grateful to you, my friends,” he said, his gentle face turned toward Robin, Mindy, Michael, Kevin, and Professor Edwards. “You all believed in me. You all never gave up.

“Forgive me, Robin,” he added, “for trying to quiet you. If I had your enthusiasm and determination, I’d have the whole cove teeming with plesiosaures. I’m a happy man tonight!”

Mr. Hunter rose. “All this excitement has made me hungry. I trust that you’ll all join me for some refreshments.”

“Great!” Kevin shouted. “Why, I’m so hungry, I could—”

“—eat a plesiosaurus!” Robin finished for him with a laugh of glee.

And with that, the celebration began.





Whitman